Jungle of Good Jackals

BY

S. GOPALAN

FOREWORD BY

HON'BLE MR. P. V. RAJAMANNAR,

Chief Justice, Madras High Court.

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Do you know of the Jackal Age in Agriculture? Do you know that one day Jackal Shandies must drive out cattle shandies?

If you don't, you must read this absorbingly funny story by Mr. Gopalan, who writes with rare charm and humour.

Mathu, the prankish boy who yokes Jackals to draw water from a well and Mr. Damodaran, the agricultural reformer, who follows this up by trying to yoke jackals to the plough, start the series of events which keep you engaged breathlessly.

The story abounds in diverting incidents and situations. Mathu is arrested by the Police for breaking into houses with Jackals, but the Jackals rescue him. For this offence of escape from Police custody, he is tried twenty years after and acquitted on the ground that the Jackals and not he were the culprits. He runs away to Ceylon as a cooly and returns as Madhavan Kangani, a prosperous Zamindar with an English wife but falls under the spell of Jackals once again. Afraid of his Jackal friends, his wife tries to run away but she is rushed back in her bandy by the Jackals. Finally Madhavan recovers from the spell of Jackals only to find that his son Kittu has come under it.

Mirth without malice, satire without cynicism and genial narrative keep you engaged throughout.

Says Mr. Justice Rajamannar, "the characters are vividly drawn with a happy blending of type and individuality........ Damodaran's scheme to harness Jackals for the development of agriculture is a superb example of Mr. Gopalan's satire. The intimacy with which Mr. Gopalan portrays the village life in South India adds considerably to the value of the book which is by itself a rattling good yarn."

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DON BOSCO PRESS, TANJORE.

1949

TO ONE

Who forgave my idling with these pages,
When more serious work awaited,
Who slaved all his life for others
With a constant smile on his lips
While I day-dreamed,
And who died a hero in his own way,
I dedicate this little work.

FOREWORD

I must start this Foreword with a note of explanation. There was a time when I used to dabble in writing in English—Poems, short stories and plays. Thanks to Dr. Cousins chiefly, I abandoned such attempts and confined myself to writing in my own language. I was convinced that there was neither purpose nor justification for Indians to use English as the medium of creative literature. If I had continued to have this conviction, I would have refused to write this foreword. But I have changed my opinion, particularly after the advent of Independence. I do not see why talented writers with the gift of expression in English should not produce literary work which would reveal to the world, a great part of which is familiar with the English language, the life and genius of the Indian people in all their variety and fulness. The work of writers like Harindranath Chatopadhyaya, Mulk Raj Anand, K. S. Venkataramani, K. B. Abbas, R. K. Narayanan and K. Nagarajan, to mention a few, has contributed much to bring about a change in my outlook.

That is why I welcome my friend Gopalan's novel "Jungle of Good Jackals." It has the first and the main characteristic of good fiction, a gripping interest. I read it practically at one sitting. The narrative flows. The descriptive passages do not hinder the

continuity of the narration. The characters are vividly drawn with a happy blending of type and individuality. Mathu, the jackal boy, reminds us of the famous Tarzan, but Mathu is peculiarly South Indian. Mr. Gopalan has managed to do a difficult task, namely, to create a character for whom the reader develops a personal affection.

There is a vein of delicate satire running right through the book. Describing a lawyer Gopalan says:

> "His freedom from facts was his great asset
> as clients counted on this virtue as the
> height of his resources. He could argue
> without a pause for a couple of hours
> without once referring to what was in the records."

Damodaran's scheme to harness jackals for the development of agriculture is a superb example of Mr. Gopalan's satire. The intimacy with which Mr. Gopalan portrays the village life in South India adds considerably to the value of the book which is by itself a rattling good yarn. I am sure several readers in this country and in other countries will enjoy this novel.

26th November '49,
MADRAS.

P. V. RAJAMANNAR.

PREFACE

All the characters in this story are, of course, fictitious. But the Jackals are real. I hope they will not resent my divulging their identity, especially their readiness to come under men's yoke.

What objection could men have to domesticate jackals ? I am sure my readers will be easily persuaded that there is nothing fantastic in the idea. But I want them to realise that far from being fantastic this measure of progress in agriculture is almost inevitable.

Nor is this story a mere anticipation of the inevitable. It is based on something that actually happened. Especially, the main theme of harnessing jackals to draw water is the least imaginary part of it. It is a trite saying that truth is stranger than fiction. Here is a piece of truth in a world addicted to fiction.

Some years ago I had to stay in a remote village in my District. I vividly remember the moon-lit night when some villagers ran up and dragged me to a chilli garden to show me what I had been refusing to believe. I went and saw what I have feebly tried to describe in these pages.........some philanthropic jackals, desirous of serving men, obviously to avert a food crisis, pulling the ropes of a well and moving up and down like a team of bullocks, only more efficiently doing the job than our bullocks.

Of course one need not actually witness their performance to accept the view that jackals are cut out for this important role of service to man. The stunted, little bullocks our farmers use are only slightly less tiny than jackals; while the latter are more numerous and infinitely cheaper. Harnessing jackal-power is no more chimerical than harnessing the atom.

But I am digressing. Why should I labour an idea so simple and reasonable?

It only remains for me to acknowledge that two of the chapters in this book already appeared in the Hindu some years ago and to thank its Editor for permitting me to reproduce them here.

Before I close I must express my deep gratitude to the Hon'ble Sri. P. V. Rajamannar, Chief Justice, Madras High Court, for his valuable foreword to this little book.

S. GOPALAN

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Jungle of Good Jackals

CHAPTER I

The Jackal Catcher

Summer always brought to the village of Nalla-narikkadu, along with myriads of bright winged birds, a creature who fascinated the villagers, young and old, more than their fleeting stock of fauna. It was the Narikoravan. This unfailing visitor always walked in, punctually at the commencement of the hot season, clad in his loin-cloth and carrying a bag of Jackal hide. Usually, he came with his spouse, a slim woman in multi-coloured rags preserved carefully by ceaseless stitching, being the heir-loom of her husband's family with the dust of ages in every shred of it. But whether she came with him or not his bullock always did, a little, stunted animal indispensable to his profession. They brought with them various useful articles for sale-honey from the Western Ghats extracted with their own hands, (often his wife contradicted him rudely on this point and claimed the achievement exclusively for herself); medicinal herbs that could conquer death; jewels made of bone or porcelain which the village lassies loved; needles innumerable in bamboo tubes, of the efficacy of which their habiliments were an ocular demonstration; and odds and ends which people everywhere might require. The children of the village, no doubt, fully appreciated the value of these articles but they thought of the Korava with a vague sensation of delight not for these

things but for his astonishing sleight-of-hand and the unravelled mystery of his fur-bag which, they were sure, contained more than he cared to reveal to them for, did he not now and then furtively take out of his elastic bag a real, little human head, with blinking eyes and a set of teeth that long haunted their sleep ?

This year he came with his spouse and his usual stock-in-trade. His woman walked along the cottages with a strutting dignity, conscious of her importance. The stunted bullock, too, felt a sort of superiority in their company ; for, it ignored entirely the vociferous dogs and moved fearlessly. They reached their usual camping place underneath a big tree opposite to a small pond and here they made themselves comfortable.

The Narikkoravan visited the village only during the waxing moons. On this occasion as the moon mounted up and as the villagers threw themselves down to sleep on the vacant space in front of their cottages, he walked out with his bullock into the jungle. What he went for, every one knew. But who had actually seen what he did inside the jungle ? This question the children always asked. But very few had actually seen it.

If on this night, they had followed him into the jungle, they would have witnessed his strange doings. He led his bullock to a big meadow far away from the homesteads and here he pushed it down. The faithful bullock meekly lay on its side with eyes closed and still as dead. Behind this feinting animal, the Korava crouched naked. There was nothing strange in this ; but if any one had gone this way a few minutes later, he would have witnessed a solitary jackal jumping about the animal, jumping this side and that, sniffing at it, pecking at it and uttering the familiar howl of the

jackals, and he would not easily have realised that it was the Korava and not a real jackal.

The audience for whom the Korava acted were duly attracted. From a hundred places in the thickets the jackals watched him minutely. The Korava could see the steady radiance of their inquisitive eyes in the darkness of the thickets. They ran to each other and discussed. Their natural cunning made them suspicious at the sudden appearance of a dead bullock in their midst. It was too good to be true.

"I passed that very spot a little while ago" said the eldest and fattest of them whom they called Big Brother "I saw no trace of it. How does it come there all of a sudden?"

"Perhaps the bullock fell dead just now," speculated a young spirit in the herd more out of hunger than out of discretion. "I think I could smell a kinsman there jumping about. He must have followed the animal from the next village. It is to his credit that he smelt the animal sooner than we did."

"You are hare-brained, Hasty!" rebuked Big Brother "you must learn caution from me. I have no doubt it is our enemy and not our friend."

"What, if I go a little nearer?" persisted Hasty whose appetite was keener than that of aged Big Brother. "How clearly does it seem to me that it is the voice of a kinsman and a friend!"

"Oooh! Oooh!" came the compelling calls of the dissembling Korava in convincing succession.

Slowly the herd was disarmed. Hasty became sure beyond words. Even Big Brother wavered. For one second they all stood, their sense of smell and hearing all alert. It was a wide open space before

them with no thicket or cover nearby. Except for a small tree near the beast, there was nothing to conceal them from the clear full moon light. What would be their fate if it was after all a treacherous trick? But hunger counselled them to have courage and they all issued forth.

No doubt they moved with great caution, Big Brother leading them and Hasty being purposely kept at the rear. They approached circuitously and gingerly. The nearer they came, the surer felt Hasty. The Jackal-catcher swelled with joy at the sight of this bumper harvest. Though his mimetic art was particularly on trial just now, yet he snatched time to mark Big Brother and his broad back. Where in the whole neighbourhood could he get such precious hide as this?

"Oooh! Oooh! Oooh! Oooh!" he cried in sheer delight and his greeting was so like that of a jackal that even Big Brother was taken in. Hasty had already left his allotted place at the rear and moved forward. One minute more and their reputation for cunning and wisdom would have been shattered for ever. It was just saved at the critical moment by a voice, that was familiar to them. They had lost all their caution so that when the voice spoke to them it took them some time to recognise it.

"Run away! Run away!" came the voice "what! Don't you see who it is? Fools, run away."

It was their own mother tongue and they understood who spoke. It was all spoken in their own rounded "Ooohs" and liquid howls. They checked themselves in time and fled. But not before Hasty had had a nasty hit on his back from the short stumpy stick hurled at them by the Korava in sheer exasperation.

Now, that some one gave the caution to the jackals in language which was clearly theirs and that that some one was a human being seemed beyond question to Korava. The voice was unmistakable. What would he not give to learn the language of the jackals? But his first feeling was one of hatred against the unseen counsellor of the jackals rather than of admiration. He moved to the tree, still on all fours like a jackal, and looked up. He was sure the voice emanated from that tree. At first he saw nothing, but soon a slight movement overhead riveted his attention. And then he heard a sound as of somebody chuckling.

This put it beyond all doubt. The Korava was surprised but not afraid, although nothing like it had happened in all his varied experience of the jackal-world. He felt greatly insulted. Surely he must have his revenge.

"Will you get down or shall I stone you to death from here?" said the Korava.

"You are welcome to do what you like" came the reply "But I tell you, you don't do your job as well as you suppose. I can do it better."

"Who are you?".

"None that you do not know."

The Korava jumped up and caught the branch on which the speaker was seated. He pulled it down till it snapped and came down. With it came the offender.

"Don't be in a temper" said the offender coolly coming into the open in the clear moon light" Take your animal and walk away!"

"You are Mathu, are you not?" asked the Korava "why did you come here to spoil my best

chance in life? That fat jackal, what a back it had! what bushy tail! I counted on it to make my money this year and you have ruined my chance. Do you think I will let you go now? You are an abandoned urchin. No one wants you in the village. You are hated everywhere. I am going to kill and bury you here."

"I assure you, it is not possible" said Mathu laughing. "I won't permit you to kill or catch a single jackal as long as I am here. They are my friends."

"Your friends!"

"Yes, my friends who understand me and whom I understand. If you do not go away at once, I will have you tailed to death by a thousand jackals!"

"Get them here" shouted the Korava "I shall deal with them and you at one stroke. Otherwise, my name is not Bondili!"

"Oooh! Oooh! Oooh! Oooh!" cried Mathu "Oooh! Oooh! Oooh! Oooh!"

Immediately the Korava saw clouds of dust all round. The clouds came nearer and nearer and closer and closer and completely enveloped him. Mathu walked through the cloud and posted himself behind the jackals who advanced up to their enemy and pelted him with dust and stone with their hind legs. The poor man tried to defend himself by hurling stones and sticks at the crowd but soon he realised the futility of resistance against this organized attack and lay flat on the ground like one dead. Big Brother slowly approached him to satisfy himself if he was dead.

"Leave him," said Mathu from at a distance, "you have taught him a lesson."

The jackals left him but surrounded the bullock which now showed itself very much alive and began to run. It was pursued by the jackals into the jungle.

The Korava rose in amazement and ran to the village.

In the morning the village was surprised at the sudden and premature disappearance of the Korava and his mate. The children were hugely disappointed.

CHAPTER II

The Little Thief

The people of Nallanarikkadu were at a loss to understand why their village was so called. The jackals which infested their village were as troublesome and dangerous as jackals anywhere else. They were as unsparing of their poultry and their cattle as the rest of their kind. They were equally unsparing of their maize, ground-nut and ragi crops; while they were never known to treat with tenderness the unwary men falling in their midst late at night as they often did. Yet they called their village, "The Jungle of Good Jackals." Obviously it was one of those place-names which meant nothing in particular; or it must be that their ancestors were guided by a grim sense of irony when they christened their place.

Their legend had it that centuries ago their lands were fertile and they did not have to draw a bucket of water. Divine hands from below the earth and from

the clouds above kept their fields wholesomely wet. But a terrible sand storm raging for a whole week buried their place beyond resurrection; the original inhabitants were mercilessly extirpated; and when the ancestors of the present men settled here they had to contend with a howling wilderness of jackals. They had on the one hand to recreate the village and plough the sands and on the other to fight the jackals; and yet they never once thought of changing the ironical old name, Nallanarikkadu.

A small group of palm-leaf huts, straggling beside dry fields, with patches here and there of tall grass nodding in the tearing wind was the substantial result of their enterprise. One viewed their achievement in a sympathetic light this afternoon as the full glare of the mid-day sun blazed up the endless stretch of ruined land and the irregular pathless paths of white, carious earth "crumbling under feet like bone dust." All around in the distance, clattered the meandering fringe of palmyra trees, grim witnesses of the bleak ruin.

There was unbroken hush in the homesteads this noon. It made one feel that the terrible heat had subdued all activity and that the villagers were all in a swoon inside their huts. But a closer study would have revealed that the huts were empty; for the people including women and children, were all in their distant fields drawing from their deep wells the elusive water for their ground-nuts and chillies. Their crops mortgaged in advance to their financiers drew them forth hours before sunrise every day and kept them engaged in the toil.

"Of dropping buckets into empty wells

And growing old in drawing *nothing up*."

This noon the silence was prolonged much beyond the usual time. Even the little children with a precocious sense of responsibility were still away in the company of their elders. Nor was there any sign of life anywhere. A dog lying with its nose buried in sands in front of one of the huts had not stirred at least for a couple of hours; while a man lying on his bare back in the slender shade of a jack tree seemed either dead or utterly unconscious, for the ants and white ants which the soil bred in abundance competed with each other for dominion over his body. The sun shone meltingly all the while and time seemed to stand still.

Suddenly the dog whipped itself up and yelled. Another dog far away in another part of the village sympathetically repeated the yell. A third dog joined the invisible choir and soon the silence was rudely chased away by the furious yells of a hundred dogs. The man under the jack tree stirred for the first time and cautioned the dog in a monosyllabic curse to lie quiet. But the dog did not feel itself free to back out after having sounded the alarm and roused its keen-eared companions. He was now a helpless part of a system that barked.

Surely this was too much even for the inveterate sleeper under the tree. He rose with a curse and shaking off the insects on him ran to punish the troublesome cur. But he arrested himself on the way and gaped in wonderment.

He saw that for disturbing the peace of the afternoon his dog had sound cause. He saw the front door of his master's house thrown open and somebody inside stealthily meddling with things. As he walked up in surprise, the thief rushed out and fled with a large bit of ripe cucumber in his mouth.

A thief in the house of the village Headman and that in glaring daylight! The man quailed within him at the first thought of his master's inevitable rage. Picking his long stick from the ground, the insignia of his office as Talayari of the village, he pursued the flying thief. In an instant the dogs rushed up from all directions and followed in full cry.

"It is that accursed boy!" shouted the Talayari presumably for the consumption of the dogs. "The nasty fellow must be taught a lesson."

The thief tried his best to escape, though he realised it was unwise to run with the dogs close at his heels and the Talayari closing in with a portentous stick. Just then, to add to his confusion, he saw in front of him the villagers returning from the fields. This was the decisive moment. He stopped suddenly and made a friendly gesture to the dogs. He succeeded admirably in negotiating with them; for though they surrounded him and snarled at first, they soon wagged their tails in recognition of him.

The Talayari flew at him and gripped him by the hand. The offender, still provokingly munching the cucumber, pretended to struggle till the men in front came up and then yielded.

"What is this silly pursuit?" scolded the man who walked up first. "I had ordered you to guard the house and you are playing bo-peep with this urchin!"

The speaker was Pichaimuthu Ambalagaran, a tall and sturdy man with a bushy moustache. His voice was commanding as befitted the village Headman of Nallanarikkadu who had held the office for the previous twenty years.

"I am not playing with him, Ejaman" pleaded the Talayari. "He stole into Ejaman's house and would have left nothing inside if I had not driven him out."

"And what were you doing when he entered," shouted the village Headman eyeing his servant furiously. He then turned to the boy and soundly thrashed him.

The boy roared in pain. The Headman pushed him away and entered his house. By this time the women had also come up and they hastened to the place, full of curiosity, shouting for the news.

"This son of a bad fellow never steals into any house other than mine" complained the Headman's wife "Once a year, he empties our pots. Last year he did it and now again he is at it. Is there no one in this village to break his leg?"

"Is it Mathu, the ill-fated son of Suppan?" queried her neighbour, out of breath for running "I knew he would come to no good. Yet the sooth-sayer predicted he would be a ruler! Indeed, a ruler he looks like turning into!"

In the conversation that followed the boy was forgotten. He slunk behind for some time and then took to his heels.

The village was now echoing with voices everywhere. Children moved about quarrelling and crying and women called to and answered each other in that peculiar prolonged shout which they adopted to broadcast their message; "Eh-h-h-h—Rama!" "Eh-h-h-h-h—Suppa." The cattle rushed in chasing each other and filling the air with the tinkle of their bells. And life poured in from the westering sun.

Then suddenly as by the turning of a switch the terrible heat subsided. The sun-shine was dimmed by dark patches of clouds. There were rumbles of thunder and a sudden gust of vaporous wind; and then came the rain pattering on the palm-leaf roofs and the noisy branches of the palmyra trees and lashing wet all created things.

The group of people followed by the Talayari dispersed in all directions and ran home to their houses. For a couple of hours the rain lasted, marked by unusual thunder and lightning. The Headman, securely seated on his pial under his impenetrable palmyra roof, covered over with ragi-straw and looking at the crouching figure of the Talayari underneath the jack tree lashed by the rain, quite forgot all about the depredations of Mathu in the evening.

But his wife Malayathal who was arranging the articles inside and whose heart sank with grief at the sight of things thrown pell-mell and long preserved pots broken hurried out with samples in her hand of the wreckage.

"Look at this and this and this!" she burst out, throwing them before her husband," what do you have left for food tonight? You are sitting there coolly and would not even rebuke the scoundrel who has wrought so much havoc."

She threw a broken pot down in fury to excite her husband into action.

"Govinda! Push the fellow here!" ordered Pichaimuthu. "I shall shatter his back-bone!"

Govindan, the Talayari, stood up dripping with water and, trembling all over, informed his master that the boy had run away.

"You are an idiot!" shouted the Headman and his wife together.

Just then there came a blinding flash of lightning. A peal of thunder drowned their rebuke. Successive peals rolled overhead; and then a flash and a sound as of glasswares crashing out of the heavens. Immediately the rain stopped.

CHAPTER III

Mathu, the Weird

After escaping the notice of the Headman and the crowd, Mathu took to his heels but the clouds gathered and burst unexpectedly and arrested his progress. He rushed for shelter to the giant banyan tree at the western outskirts of the village and here he nestled himself comfortably.

With soft floor of white sands and green ceiling of closeknit leaves, the tree afforded a vast shelter. Everywhere the knarled branches had rooted themselves and the whole place presented the appearance of a grand pavilion of python-like pillars raised by the skill of invisible hands. The magnitude of the tree alone was sufficient to justify the superstitious reverence in which it was held; but this remarkable formation underneath established the fact that it was the habitation of strange and mysterious spirits. To the children of Nallanarikkadu who could discern in the evenings from their huts the broad top of the tree silhouetted against the golden sky, it was an object of

unceasing wonder. Their imagination played over it in a thousand ways. In the evening they vied with each other in counting aloud the thousand crows as they fluttered along cawing to rest on its branches; and they went to sleep wondering how the birds could sleep in the company of the wicked monkeys dwelling there. Often waking up at night and hearing the premature cawing of a blind crow, they would wrap themselves up in their coarse mats and tremble at the idea that an evil spirit was stamping it to death or tearing its black feathers one by one.

But Mathu was free from such superstitious terrors. Though barely twelve years old he had spent his days and nights ever since he had known this world in lonely and unfrequented places; and he could afford to have no such terrors. His mother died at his birth; his father passed away a few years later; and to the best of his recollection, he had never had a home. He had found himself wondering, now and then, who he was, why he was named Madhavan and called Mathu, how he was different from Suppan the shepherd's son and what he was wandering about for. But this was a rare and fleeting mood of introspection in him and he walked on from place to place, briskly and unconcerned, like the birds chirping along over his head. His home was wherever he was.

He was not afraid of darkness or of solitude. He had never experienced the least trembling, waking or asleep. No thought of serpent or of venomous insects deterred him in his purposeless wanderings by night and day. He had seen on dark and damp nights, while walking along marshy fields, what his elders called the "Torch-mouthed Devils"—the phosphorescent lights suddenly exuded from the earth and moving or spinning in tall, fiery columns; and he used to pass them without tremor. He had heard strange and eerie

sounds in far-away places surrounded on all sides by grim-looking trees and yet he thought nothing of them, not even did he whistle to keep his courage up. He had been more than once attacked by the stunted porcupines which infested the jungles and yet he carried no weapon of any kind to defend himself against them. He marched through his days in a spirit of comradeship with all created things, animate or inanimate. And he was willing to fight for his place among them.

But there was one thing—the only thing—of which he was in fear; in the presence of which he felt keenly the absence of company and of the caress of affectionate hands. This was the lightning. In his fear of this phenomenon there was no trace of superstition or meaningless terror. He had closely watched the terrible force of lightning and he had been greatly impressed with its devastating effect. He had seen half-ready buds blossom into flowers under the electric kiss of the lightning; and he had seen huge hooded serpents drop on the ground in terror and lie lifeless under the blinding flash. He had learnt to think with awe of a force so powerful and so grand. And, mind you, what he was afraid of was not the mere flash but the terrible effulgence on the back of which rode the crashing thunder.

He little recognised that on this evening he was in for one of those unusual experiences of his. Here under the tree as he drew from his waist the ragi cakes on which the Headman's wife had spent much time, and commenced chewing them, he smiled to himself at his own exploits. After all, he had taken from her house but a few cakes, a sliced piece of cucumber, a little sugar and a little salt. And yet he knew that the shrew would be loud in her curses. It is true that a few pots obstructed his hurrying steps and got

broken, through no fault of his and it amused him to think of her rage and fury.

Munching and dreaming, he had sat here for an hour and still it was raining strong. He had exhausted the eatables and stretched his legs, yawning and quite at ease. Just then something moved at his side and before he could raise, a black Cobra rose on the tip of its tail and flashed its venomous eyes at him. Madhavan had always admired its magnificent hood and its *eloquent* eyes, eloquent of hatred; but while he let live the common cobra he never spared this variety because experience had taught him that it was a treacherous creature. He required no weapon to deal with snakes; his hands were peculiarly skilled in catching its slippery neck by frequent practise. He gazed fixedly at the horrid form, now dancing at full tension and ready to bury its fangs into his flesh. He knew the moment to clutch it by the throat just below the hood and then crush it leisurely and he was all alert.

Just then, there came the flash of lightning which he had learnt to dread. It lighted vast vistas of fields all around him and made him quail. He forgot where he was. He forgot the black Cobra, now planted like a stick before him ready to exhaust its bag of venom into him. He was conscious only of a terrible effulgence and the crashing overhead. Suddenly he felt himself pelted by a thousand stones and then he knew nothing.

The rain stopped a short while after and the skies waxed clear and bright. A large moon had sailed up and through every clearing in the wood flooded the ground with light. The boy slowly stirred. With eyes still closed, he remembered he was under the Banian tree. He remembered his escapade in the

evening and his flight to this shelter. Then suddenly he thought of the black cobra and started. To his surprise, he saw when he first looked round that the tree had vanished. Save for a thick stump two feet above ground nothing was there to mark the gigantic growth. The entire ground was littered with the chips hewn by the lightning from the mighty tree. Far and wide, the bits that once constituted the tree were hurled. What an event! His mind was full of it. He moved a little and stepped on soft skin and this again reminded him of the snake. He drew back his legs and looked down. It was lying withered and dead. A few feet away he saw birds and monkeys lying singed to death. It was a terrible holocaust. He alone had escaped.

"Are you still here about?" sounded a familiar voice surprising him out of his reverie.

Madhavan turned and saw in the moonlight the figure of the Talayari, walking to him. It did not occur to him to run; for ordinarily the old man was friendly to him. Besides, he thought that the chapter of the evening was closed and he stood still.

"You are a strange boy" said Govindan again "Were you not afraid of the rain and the thunder?"

"Look!" said the boy in reply pointing to the shattered tree.

"Yes, it is the work of the lightning," said the Talayari with composure, drawing near and looking critically at the ruin and carnage. "Splendid fuel, is it not? Now, tell me, are you not afraid to wander about here? Come and stay with me. In the morning you may go."

"No" said Mathu moving away.

"Stop, Madhavan!" cried the Talayari.

The boy was known by the name of Mathu and none took the trouble to utter his full name, which was Madhavan

"I know your father and your mother too. They were both good to me, come with me and don't be silly."

The kind invitation of Govindan was not accepted. Madhavan was soon lost in the jungle to the endless amazement of the Talayari.

CHAPTER IV

Big Brother and His Followers

Big Brother was the acknowledged head of the community of jackals in the neighbourhood. Apart from the fact that he was the oldest and fattest of them, his brother and sister jackals had found that he was the wisest. He was slow to make a decision and some of the younger spirits led by Hasty often grew restive under his sluggish leadership. But in the end it was always found that his decision, slowly made, was the safest and soundest one. It was true that he was often inactive and fond of resting in a thicket and falling into a reverie from which he had to be stirred by his spouse, Longface, to a realisation of things around him. But it was ever the case that after a spell of inactivity he came out with a definite programme for his fellow creatures to follow for the rest of the year. He could tell them with uncanny precision where the crabs abounded or rats infested in a particular season without ever going there. In

fact it was his mature counsel that conserved their food supply and protected them from famine and death. It was no wonder that Longface often felt that if her husband had been born in one of the cottages in the neighbourhood instead of in the knarled and thorny thicket, he would have proved with his sure and resourceful intellect an invaluable leader of men.

But despite all her admiration for his virtues, Longface was not as enamoured or proud of him as one might expect. She always found him mentally occupied and stupidly took this for coldness towards her. Obviously she was not the fit helpmate for a philosopher and statesman like Big Brother. She exhibited to her spouse her discontent in more ways than one. She was rude to him and disobedient. But the most provoking thing she did was to flirt with some of the younger spirits, notably the hot-blooded Hasty. But for the stoic calmness and noble indiffe-rence of Big Brother, some of his devoted, middle-aged lieutenants would have long time back bitten Hasty to death.

Hasty was in his own way attached to his leader. Impatient and hare-brained as he was, it was rarely that he acted contrary to the leader's command. Of course, to start with, he would protest and make counter suggestions but invariably he would subside into a recognition of his leader's superior wisdom. His turbulent spirit had, however, its own attraction for the younger spirits of the community who saw in him a daring soul and a future leader. Wrongtail, Stupid, Roundhead and Manface were the most notable in this starry company of upstarts. They had no opinion of their own but were more inclined to follow Hasty than their massive leader until they saw Hasty himself being led.

Few men in the neighbourhood could perceive these worthy personalities in the jackal world. No doubt, Bondhili, the jackal-catcher, was a keen student of their ways but his study of them was of a narrow character and he had eyes only for the breadth of their backs and mind only for the value of their hides. He was not aware of their individuality.

In this Madhavan was different. He could tell one jackal from another. He could shake hands with Big Brother, rally Longface on her flirtations and scold Hasty for his rashness and in general be one among them. As he himself claimed, he understood them and they understood him.

CHAPTER V

Pichaimuthu's Illness

Pichaimuthu, the Village Headman, had been confined to bed for nearly a month. He was too ill to move about. The bunch of margosa leaves hanging at the entrance of his hut was emblematic of his illness. Even the children in the village could gather from it that he was down with small pox.

No one in the village, not even the Village Headman, could afford to neglect his field even for a single day. And yet Pichaimuthu had stayed away from his field for a whole month. His wife had to attend on him all the time and could not devote any attention to cultivation.

He was the first man in the village, first to receive honours at festivals, first to send forth his

cattle at Pongal, first to be invited for any marriage in the neighbouring villages, and first to greet any officer that came. But now he had fallen under a kind of social black-out. His prolonged illness had vastly altered the immemorial rules of precedence and threatened to establish other influences.

It was no wonder therefore that on the sick bed he was subject to alternate fits of rage and despondency. He revolved in his mind the chief events of his career. He recalled with pride his rise to power in the village. His two formidable rivals who impeded his progress in his early days swam up in the current of his reminiscence. They now stood before him and put him in mind of his early struggles and tribulations. It was pleasing to him to reflect that one of them had suddenly died after he had very nearly succeeded in ousting him from office. Pichaimuthu was bathing in the village tank when this happy news reached him and was so beside himself with joy that at once he closed his nose with his fingers, dived deep till he contacted the sticky, clayish bottom and then came up splashing, thereby indicating to those that watched him that he had washed himself clean of one nasty foe. He now vividly remembered the scene and laughed aloud. His other enemy, who was equally troublesome, did not of course, die; but being head and ears in debt he ran away to Ceylon where he hoped to make his fortune and return with greater resources to fight Pichaimuthu. But he never returned and the Headman felt that a hidden hand was working in his favour.

He felt greatly encouraged at this thought but it was just a transitory feeling of elation. The figures of his vanquished enemies soon vanished and in their place he saw his own figure vanquished not by them but by other forces. It was the picture of harvest

time. He stood on his barren fields consumed by jealousy at the sight of prosperous fields all around. He returned home empty handed; all others in the village came home with bumper harvest. And, then, suddenly he became poor, the landholder pressed him for payment and eventually evicted him from his holding. And finally his occupation was gone.

"No, No!" he exclaimed shaking his head disapprovingly; the idea seemed to him too tragic. "It can never happen hereafter. The law has made it so difficult for the Zamindar to drive me out!"

He slowly sat on the mat and looked around him. His wife lay on the bare floor snoring. She had been tired out by the arduous vigils of the previous nights. Now that he was better, she could afford to sleep. He looked through the open doorway of his house and critically scanned the horizon. It was nearing day break. As if to confirm him a cock crew in the distance.

He moved up to the doorway and gazed out. Darkness was fading into the dim light of dawn. In a few minutes the night clouds were dashed with grey light and a group of palmyra trees was dimly discernible in the distance. They bounded his lands on one side and the sight of them made him uneasy once again. Turning round, he saw his wife stirring and then sitting up with a yawn.

"I am feeling well to-day" he told her "We must send for the Poosari and do Pooja on a large scale every day of this month to Goddess Mariyayee. In the meanwhile, go and see the fields. I am uneasy about them. It is a month since you stirred out last."

She rose and rubbed her eyes.

"I know, Malayatha, it is no use setting much hope on our lands this year," he continued. "Our fields must be lying burnt and barren. We have been away from them for full thirty days. But still our village Gods are great. If I am a good man and if they love me still, they must have preserved my property. That is why I want you to go and see now. I am perfectly well now."

Malayatha listened in silence to his desperate words of hope. He was saved from the jaws of death and that was all she cared for. Once he got well and walked out as strong and sturdy a man as ever, she was confident he could reclaim their lands in a couple of days. She was only too conscious of her husband's power and influence in the neighbourhood and there were few things he could not achieve.

"Go and see the lands first" thundered Pichaimuthu, impatient with her silence. "If you don't I will run up and see. I feel well enough for that."

Malayathal stepped out obediently and walked along the white, muddy foot path. Their groundnut fields lay far away, a couple of miles from their hut and they were well known in the village by the name of "Pavunkachi" or "Yielding gold." But to the best of her recollections they had yielded only ragi and groundnuts and these were hardly enough to put gold or silver in their hands. Though a man of importance in the village, her husband was not free from the clutches of money-lenders and his crops like those of others were mortgaged in advance to them who came round at the time of harvest with gunny bags on their shoulders which they carried back stuffed heavy with the yield, leaving very little behind.

It was clear day light when she reached the fields. And there she saw a sight that startled her with joy.

She could scarcely believe her eyes. The fields which she hoped to see parched up and barren were wet with water and everywhere the plants smiled at her. She walked up to the well in the midst of their holding and here again she was startled with joy at the sight of the wooden bucket bearing signs of frequent use. It was certain that the fields had been watered the previous night also. Who could have done this great help to them? Could it be their Talayari, Govindan? No, it could not be, for he dwelt in the next village and he had his own problems to solve. Who could have done them this silent, unpaid, unacknowledged service all these days, when they were within their hut sorrowing and feeling ruined? Could it be the village Gods?

She literally ran back to her husband. The news would act as tonic on him and restore him to his usual frame of mind. It was bound to strengthen him in his feeling that an invisible force worked in his favour.

CHAPTER VI

Is it the Work of Gods?

When Malayathal broke the astonishing news to her husband he looked at her as who should say "I told you so!" In fact his first feeling was that he was a good enough devotee of the village Gods to merit their divine help. But some time later even he could not help becoming alive to the absurdity of the idea. How was he different from Raman, his neighbour or Suppan the village blacksmith who were both ruined by just a fortnight's illness, a couple of years ago?

They too offered worship at the shrines and oftener than he did.

He declared his desire to go out at once and see for himself. But his wife was emphatic that the Gods would be displeased with him if he stirred out of the house before the usual bath and before distributing alms at the temple; and he had to follow her advice which he did with great impatience. When at last he went out and saw the fields for himself, his astonishment knew no bounds. He realised with awe that even the previous night the fields had been plentifully watered. And there had been no rain for months together!

Again he flattered himself that he was protected by divine hands. At the same time his mind went on analysing the various canny possibilities. Perhaps, his neighbour Raman had done it just out of pity and had not told him because he could not enter the pox-infected house, a house in which the stern Goddess was sojourning. Perhaps it was Govindan the village watchman. He must have snatched time at the dead of night to go here and do it. Perhaps it was any one of the many men in the neighbourhood. Was it possible? What had Pichaimuthu done to evoke this extraordinary feeling of brotherliness in them?

He met Raman Ambalagaran on his way back.

"Did you see my fields?" asked Pichaimuthu, thinking he was going to solve the mystery.

"Why should I see them?" Raman replied "I had been talking to my wife about the matter last night. You have a full year's work to do before you can reclaim them. It is a pity."

He felt himself at an advantage now over the great Pichaimuthu. He was in a position to pity the latter who always considered himself above pity.

"I am not referring to that" said Pichaimuthu, seeing how wrong he had been in picturing this man as his unknown saviour. He looked him full in the face for a while and said again "Rama, a miracle has happened. None of us had gone to our fields for a month. We hoped to find them ruined. Instead I find them as well watered as your lands. It is as if it was continuously raining on my fields alone. Come and see!"

Pichaimuthu caught the hands of Raman and dargged him to his fields in wild delight. His lands lay in a secluded part of the village and few passed that way. Raman Ambalagaran stood gazing with sheepish wonder.

"Indeed, the Gods are fond of me" declared Pichaimuthu. "There is no other explanation for this strange phenomenon."

The news spread in the village. In the help received by Pichaimuthu in his adversity, the villagers felt an assurance of similar help in their own adversity. They had only to get ill. Their fields would be preserved by better and more puissant hands than theirs. Soon stories began to circulate of similar events in the past. There was a tradition in the village that equally strange things had happened to Suppan, the father of Mathu. The Gods had now shifted their affection to the village Headman. Such things had been before in this village and the oldest among them looked wise and were disposed to treat the matter as quite usual and ordinary. They indignantly declared that wonder was out of place and

betokened a lamentable lack of faith which, according to them, had tended to render such events rarer and rarer.

CHAPTER VII

Mathu Yokes Jackals

When he was in the company of the village folk it was all very well for Pichaimuthu to flatter himself that he was the petted darling of the Gods. But alone in his house with the shades of the evening falling all around his cottage, he was inclined to question his own title to divine help. After all he had not been such a pious man. He could not but recall how in the early days of his office he had not scrupled to appropriate for his own use a part of the money collected by him for the village festival. And he had to prepare false accounts, Surely when he searched inwardly he could not help starting at this black record of his. Was he to believe that the very Gods he had cheated were ignorant of his perfidious conduct and had cultivated a peculiar fancy for him?

He had slowly shed his superstitious wonder. A strong curiosity to know the truth persisted in his mind. He resolved to find it out that very night.

When it was midnight he wrapped himself in his towel and walked out gingerly. His wife had already slept away and he did not wish to disturb her. He had decided to go alone but when he had walked a few paces he suddenly paused as if tormented by a sudden

fear. He turned back and came and stood before his neighbour Raman's cottage. He could see Raman sleeping on the bare earth in front of his house. He went close to him and tapped him with his fingers.

"Come with me" he told him as soon as Raman woke up "Don't ask me why, come!"

Raman followed him without a word. They were soon away in the fields. It was dim moonlight and they knew that soon the moonlight would fade away. Of course, they were not afraid of darkness nor could they afford to be. They had both stayed away many nights in their fields. But on this night they were not their usual selves.

They nestled themselves close together in the dark shadow cast by the tree. Each had a big stick in his hand and was prepared for any event that might provoke the exercise of it. From the position of the dim and faded moon above, they could see that it was already an hour after midnight.

Suddenly a small boy appeared on the field. They both recognised him and it was Mathu.

"That young rogue knows no difference between night and day" whispered Raman. "He is always out and wandering."

"Hush!" said Pichaimuthu "He will pass away soon!"

But pass away he did not. He approached the well and taking his stand near it, did something which startled the two spectators. Mathu sent out successive shrieks in the air which, from a distance, they would have surely taken for the howling of jackals.

"Ooh! Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!" rose his voice. Soon there were responsive howls and the two men under

the tree were bewildered to see jackals dashing up to the field, like dogs summoned for a hunt. One, two, three, they counted in startled surprise till the number increased to twenty. Then Madhavan uttered something in the nature of a command at which they all formed themselves into two rows, walked backward to the well and stood like bullocks ready to be harnessed. Madhavan threw on to them the ropes used for drawing water from the well. This the jackals caught between their teeth and began to walk backward and forward, all the time tenaciously holding the rope in their mouths. Now and then Mathu ordered them to stop and approached them and patted them on their backs; and as if in appreciation of this bit of kindness they started their work with added briskness. In childish ecstacy the boy clapped his hands and laughed as bucket after bucket was drawn and emptied and the team of jackals indicated to him their hearty approval of his merriment by energetically wagging their bushy tails.

Big Brother moved prominently among them. There was enough moon light to reveal his massive form and his dignified movement. Although he was one of the creatures docilely bearing the rope, still his attitude made it clear that he did so purely on principle, perhaps to oblige a friend like Mathu. But Hasty made it clear that he took real delight in the work which he signified by his boisterous behaviour. It may be difficult to believe but he actually clapped his fore-legs in imitation of Mathu and, surprisingly, was able to produce a little sound. Barring Big Brother and Hasty, the other jackals were a trifle mercenary, for they paused now and then and expected Mathu to throw to them the bunches of groundnuts which he uprooted for the purpose from the neighbouring fields of Raman. But Madhavan was a stern

task-master and when they dawdled too long over eating he actually ran up and pinched their ears.

Pichaimuthu and Raman looked at each other not wholly free from terror. If really a troop of gods had appeared on the fields instead of the troop of jackals, they would not have been more shocked or surprised. The longer they saw the strange spectacle of the jackals drawing water for the fields, the more they felt glued to the earth; except that when Mathu liberally fed the jackals on his groundnuts, Raman so far forgot himself as to utter a groan meant as protest which was stifled in time by Pichaimuthu closing his mouth tightly with his towel.

The moon light had faded but still the silent, unrewarded team worked on tirelessly, their juvenile commander briskly guiding them; while the awe-struck spectators afraid to move or cough kept to their places under the tree. Then slowly light began to struggle with darkness; and with a shout of joy Mathu released the jackals and ran away with them over ridges and fields with as much celerity as if he were one of them.

Not till then did the two men rise to their feet with deep sighs of relief and begin to speed to their huts, their hearts bursting with the uncanny news they carried with them.

CHAPTER VIII

The Legends about Mathu

The people of the village who had woven fine webs of fancy around the phenomenon and who would have been positively angry with any rational explanation of

it were surely not disappointed at the tale related by the two men. It was stranger than the gods themselves appearing and drawing bucket after bucket with celestial hands to pasture their fields. It had never occurred to them till now that jackals could be put to such use and the idea of Mathu seemed to them unquestionably inspired.

Mathu had now become the chief topic of the day. For a long time he had appeared to them an uncanny chap. Now their imagination invested him with a thousand qualities. One of them gave out that for a long time he had known that the boy's touch was the best cure for scorpion's sting. Another extended the efficacy of his touch to snake-bites. A third maintained that it was potent enough to cure all kinds of maladies. A fourth gave out that he usually slept on tree-tops and was one day actually seen emerging from a lotus like Goddess Lakshmi. Every thing seemed natural and possible after this strange apocalypse.

It was reserved for Raman Ambalagaran to bring a touch of realism to these legendary anecdotes. He had known the boy's father intimately and now narrated an event that happened when Mathu was but five years old. It was an event which he and his wife could remember well enough.

"It is now nearly nine or ten years since this happened ?" he told them. "I was sitting on the pial of Suppan's house. Suppan was also sitting there along with them. Mathu was running about in front of us. It was then that a sooth-sayer came. Most of you may not have seen this great prophet. I myself have not seen him since. Suppan welcomed him cordially and respectfully and made him sit with us. He also expressed a desire that the visitor should read his son's palm. The sooth-sayer agreed and when the boy was called and his palm shown, he started

from his place with a loud exclamation. 'Believe me or not' cried the sooth-sayer. 'This boy is destined to be a ruler!' Our curiosity was really roused. We plied him with questions but he rose and walked away. I used to laugh over his prediction. My wife ridiculed the idea. But now I doubt it not."

"But he is not a ruler now" said one of them. "He is nowhere near being one!"

"How do you know!" retorted Raman.

"Perhaps he will become at least a Zamindar" speculated another.

"If he is to become a ruler it means he is to become a ruler" reiterated Raman "No use trying to water it down. And you and I will live to see it."

The matter did not stop here. The Zamindar's agent who came round to the village to estimate the crops raised by the tenants returned to his principal with the exciting news. The Zamindar heard the story with wonder but the first remark he made was to ask his agent to raise the figure estimated for Pichaimuthu's lands.

"The fellow must measure more this year" said the Zamindar twinkling his eyes. "With supernatural aid, he must be getting more than ever before."

To which proposition the agent heartily agreed by adding that it was a clever suggestion which had never occurred to him.

CHAPTER IX

Damodar's Scheme

The Zamindar of Nallanarikkadu was an ardent member of what was known as the "Pinjrapole Club"

in the neighbouring town of Ettukkottai. It may appear a matter for surprise that any club intended for men to meet in was named after the Pinjrapole. It is therefore necessary to correct any possible impression that it was its official name. The board outside the club buildings proudly announced its name as the "Metropolitan Club." But one of the founder-members of the club was black-balled by the other members and he hurled at it the nick-name of Pinjrapole which had stuck to it ever afterwards. His justification for thus deriding his own handiwork was that the President of the club was lame, one of the committee members had lost an eye and the Secretary himself, his principal persecutor, had broken his right hand at tennis and was going about in bandage at the time in question. The rare impartiality of this description consisted in the fact that the author of it himself had a game shoulder. Whatever might be the origin of this name, the people of the town called it and recognised it only by that name. Indeed man's memory is so benignantly short that soon the sting of the appellation was lost and succeeding committees and Secretaries of the institution freely used it as a device to draw a cheer at its otherwise dreary meetings.

Every day the Zamindar was the first to come to the club and the last to leave it. Not unoften the allurements provided here by an energetic secretary proved too strong for him and he stopped away till the early hours of the morning when he had to be removed to his residence by his bearers. It was to indulge freely his extremely clubbable nature that the Zamindar had constructed a bungalow in the town at great cost at a time when all his tenants had defaulted to pay their dues for some years.

On the day following the sensational revelations at Nallanarikkadu, the Zamindar came to the club as

usual, with the unusual news about Mathu. Here he met people of importance to whom he related the incident. Some were inclined to poo-pooh the matter but some took it seriously enough. In particular one gentleman well known as Mr. Damodar who had devoted his whole life time to agricultural research and had written numerous books on the subject of improving the lot of poor agriculturists made a special note of this interesting incident in his diary.

Three important results flowed from this record.

The gentleman arranged a trip to the village to inspect the spot. He did not go alone. He had already communicated to the District Collector on the importance of deputing some officials to go with him and it was a tribute to the far-sighted sympathy of the Collector with anything connected with agricultural progress that Mr. Damodar's note received urgent attention. One Assistant Director of Agriculture, one Agricultural Demonstrator, one Tahsildar and two Revenue Inspectors were deputed to accompany Mr. Damodar. It so chanced that the Collector who was a regular Club-goer confidentially expressed one evening in the presence of his intimate circle of friends his fervent hope that something would come out of this mission of Damodar. Immediately two of the non-official members of the club, one a Rao Bahadur and the other a Rao Sahib began to evince keen interest and offered to bear all the expenses of the mission. The result was that Mr. Damodar left for the village of Nallanarikkadu accompanied by the officers and the two non-officials, an impressive team who on arriving at the destination called upon the Zamindar to make arrangements for a demonstration of the novel departure in agriculture. In vain did the Zamindar try to persuade them that the celebrated Mathu was a mere urchin and vagabond of whose whereabouts little

could be said. But the enthusiastic visitors knew better and after exhausting the hospitality of the Zamindar set out in search of the actual spot.

It was a wearying excursion for these well-intentioned gentlemen. In fact, the Tahsildar who had some experience of the locality was beginning to share the view of the Zamindar and threw out a cautious hint with due deference to Mr. Damodar that they might return without wasting more time. The two titled non-officials supported this proposal. But the Assistant Director of Agriculture wanted at least to see the spot in question. The Agricultural Demonstrator supported this idea by adding that it was necessary to test the soil watered by jackals and for this purpose wanted to carry a bit of it home. But the leader of the party, the Champion of agriculturists, indignantly protested against their scepticism and lukewarmness. He insisted that the party should not return until the boy was secured and a real demonstration was made.

A vigorous search was therefore made for the boy. Many of the villagers were engaged on promise of handsome rewards to get him. The entire countryside was scoured for two days. But Mathu remained a myth. The party had to return unsuccessful carrying with them the united imprecations of the Zamindar's staff and the villagers in general who had to join in the vain search.

Although this first result of the record made in his diary by Damodar was a little unpromising, still the second result was momentous. While all the other members of the party were entirely disillusioned and while even the two titled non-officials who had hoped to earn higher honours by doing a stroke of real service in this connection confessed that it was useless to

proceed further in the matter, Damodar alone remained staunch in his faith. He fully believed that Mathu had unconsciously given a new orientation to agriculture and it would be folly to abandon the quest on the mere ground that they could not get at him in a couple of days. The great possibilities in agriculture thrown up by this happening in the remote corner of a village were vividly pictured by him and he only wanted the authorities to listen to him with faith and carry out his ideas.

Luckily it so chanced that just at this juncture the Government had set up a body called the Agricultural Commission to tour the whole province of Madras and formulate a plan of speedy reform and progress in agriculture. The Commission after a fruitful journey through various cities in the course of which they had abundant opportunities to study conditions for themselves visited the town of Ettukottai just a few days after the failure of Damodar's expedition to Nallanarikkadu. Damodar who was never behind-hand in securing interviews with commissions of this kind had already applied for and fixed up an interview with them. On arriving at the town the Agricultural Commission called on Mr. Damodar to appear before them and give them the benefit of his views. The good man was beside himself with joy and having thoroughly prepared a lengthy treatise on the subject stood full two hours before the august body unfolding his interesting and thrilling scheme for organizing jackals in the service of the villagers.

He had no doubt that he had made a smashing impression on the members of the Commission. When he finished reading his well documented treatise, he removed his spectacles to see on the faces of his distinguished listeners the result of his triumphant performance. But he saw something entirely un-

expected. Great was his indignation to discover that the members were exchanging incredulous glances; incredulous not of the practicality of his scheme which, perhaps, he might not have minded very much; but incredulous of his sanity which seemed to him a scandalous injustice to a public worker and veteran expert in Agriculture of his standing. It was obvious that they seriously doubted his sanity; for one of them muttered audibly:

"Poor man! I wonder how the idea got into his head!"

"He is incurably crazy" said the Chairman of the Commission.

"But he is the most consistent lunatic" exclaimed another member.

"The District Magistrate ought to have known about him" said another.

Mr. Damodar clenched his teeth and turned in fury on his calumniators. He would have loudly protested his sanity then and there and called them lunatics. But two things prevented his doing so.

The first thing was that he was really too sane and too well in possession of his senses to attempt such a protestation. He suddenly remembered the story of the man in the lunatic asylum who tried to convince visitors that he was perfectly sane and that he was forced to remain there by the machinations of his enemies. He remembered that the visitors merely looked at him in wonder and exclaimed "How sanely he talks! One would almost take him for a sane man!" Mr. Damodar was afraid of a similar fate at the hands of his traducers. He might overwhelm them with the perfect logic and practicality of his scheme. He might

expatiate eloquenty on the inevitable exhaustion of the catle wealth of the country in a few years and on the urgent need to evolve an alternative method by harnessing jackals. His facts and figures were irrefutable. But the Commissioners would have simply exclaimed "How logically he talks! But all mad men are notoriously logical!"

The second thing that prevented him from obeying his natural impulse to indulge in further protestations was not merely a subjective realisation of the futility of protest; but an objective and concrete impediment in the shape of the District Magistrate who, afraid of the posture of Mr. Damodar as he stood facing his antogonists rushed to him and drew him out of the hall. Even so, Mr. Damodar made his exit with a polite bow and with such composure as should have persuaded the members of the commission of the error of their whole attitude to him.

But it was soon made clear that Mr. Domodar was not the type of man to be snuffed out by sneers and ignorant ridicule. His withers were still unwrung. The more unwilling people appeared to accept his view, the more hopelessly convinced he became. He was firmly convinced that Jackals could be harnessed for the benefit of mankind. And thus the third important result flowed out of the faithful record in his diary and this was that he contributed his treatise to all the leading newspapers in the province. Of course one or two of the conservative papers returned the article promptly with this comforting comment that the editor "considered his views entertaining." But the majority of them avidly seized his suggestions. The great scheme was splashed in arresting head lines. The reaction of the newspaper world could well be gathered from some of the head lines. "Novel Departure in Agriculture" "Strange yet practical

Scheme" "Domesticating Jackals" "An Eminent Agriculturist on the use of Jackals" "Do you know how useful Jackals are?" "Truth is stranger than fiction." "Believe it or Not!" were some of the complimentary headlines. One Daily called "The Madras Wind" had so completely mistaken the purpose of the author as to call it "A Humorous skit on Agriculture!" But it little mattered to Damodar what they thought of it. It was enough that his sound ideas were accorded the publicity they so richly deserved.

CHAPTER X

Mathu Handed up

On shandy days Nallanarikkadu wears a deserted appearance. The big weekly shandy shifts from place to place but it always means a wearying walk to the people of Nallanarikkadu and their cattle. This week it was held in a place known as the Great Lake five miles away. Of course it is the driest place in the locality and there is no trace anywhere here of a great or small lake having ever existed; unless the small horse-pond presenting occasionally the only sight of water in this arid region may be said to be reminiscent of a once great lake.

Nallanarikkadu was famous at the shandy for its brinjals. You may get bigger and more attractive looking brinjals from other places. But those of this village were more tasty, though they looked unpromising; just as the jack fruits of Great Lake were smaller but sweeter than the rest. Pichaimuthu and

his wife, his neighbour Raman and his wife and in fact everyone in the village who had a patch of land to call his own cultivated this vegetable with care and exported it in considerable quantity. This week they left for Great Lake very early in the morning before the cock crew with heavy baskets of brinjals; and yet it was broad day light by the time they reached the shandy. But they had no reason to regret the delay; for men and women from far off places were eagerly awaiting their arrival and in spite of higgling and quarrelling had to take their wares at their price. Their baskets were emptied sooner than they had expected and the rest of the day till darkness fell they spent in filling them up with things from other places.

It was about three hours after sunset when the village Headman and his spouse returned to their place They were in advance of the other villagers. For they had the advantage of travelling in their double-bullock cart which had earned Pichaimuthu golden opinions from Revenue and Police officers alike whose favour he cultivated assiduously. The animals dashed fast tinkling pleasantly along the narrow path leading to his cottage and stopped only when they reached the open ground in front of it on which was heaped a liberal supply of straw.

Here a sight greeted Pichaimuthu and his wife which made them wild with rage. Hearing the tinkle of the bullocks a small figure shot out of the cottage immediately followed by a crowd of jackals. In the bright moon light they could clearly see and identify the culprit. It was the incorrigible Mathu. Malayathal uttered a long series of curses and ran into her house to find the doors open and things thrown pell-mell inside. Pichaimuthu, too, was shocked by the conduct of the boy. Of course, he remembered how deeply he was beholden to Mathu. But there was a

limit to one's gratitude; and when he saw all his pots broken, his grains scattered and looted and his hens and geese carried away by the jackals, he decided that this was the limit.

The other villagers returned in course of time and found their houses, too, broken open and their things looted. They all assembled outside their cottages and heard the account given by the Headman. The more they talked of the matter, the more were they weaned from their notion that Mathu was a darling of the Gods. A boy that lived with jackals, stole into their houses with jackals and feasted on their provisions in the company of jackals appeared to them an odious thief and little better than that. It was now a wonder to them that at any time they should have viewed him differently. It was time that he was taught a lesson.

It was therefore unanimously decided by the people to hand him over to the police. Pichaimuthu himself sat down and wrote a complaint forgetting, under the influence of his hysterical wife, what he owed to the boy. The nearest police station was five miles from their village and thither a man was at once despatched with the complaint setting forth the outrageously criminal conduct of the fellow.

But the police came only the next morning. The Sub-Inspector who was present at the station when the complaint was received was inclined to treat the matter lightly. But when it was pointed out to him that Pichaimuthu was one of the signatories of the complaint, he ordered two constables to go to the spot at once. The villagers whose wrath was not mollified to any degree by their sleep overnight received them with enthusiasm and helped them in their work. The constables saw in the cottage the evidence of the visit of Mathu and his mates and at once they began

a search for the culprit, a search in which all the villagers assisted them for they all felt equally outraged by his conduct on the previous night.

It was by no means an easy job to get at Mathu. The search party wandered far and wide in the neighbourhood following the foot-prints on the clear, white earth; but Mathu could not be found. After the foot-prints had led them a pretty dance, they realised just when the sun was setting that it was useless to go further and returned to the village. On the way back the constables expressed the view that the search should be commenced early next day; but Pichaimuthu advised that it would be better to stop the search and see if the fellow did not turn up himself; for he believed that Mathu was not hiding but simply absent from the locality on one of his usual meaningless wanderings.

Pichaimuthu had not concluded his advice when one of the men shouted. It was the voice of Raman Ambalagaran.

"There he is" cried he. "In the name of everything strange, it is he!"

It was no doubt Mathu. Calmly smiling he sat at the top of the long flight of ascending steps leading up to the village temple. He sat at the very entrance of the village, while they had gone about searching for him in every thicket and jungle for miles around. They rushed up to him at once. But Mathu did not stir; nor did he utter a word of protest or fear. The constables seized him by the hand and led him into the village followed by a big crowd.

The men and women of Nallanarikkadu should have stopped with handing Mathu over to the Police. Mathu had no complaint in his heart against this

course adopted by them. It was, no doubt, silly of them. It was most ungrateful of them. He did not expect them to behave better than that. But he did object to their following him in a crowd, shouting and hissing and jeering as if he were a monkey. The unkindest cut of all was the part that the village Headman took in baiting him.

But the worst was to come yet and it came from the mouth of Malayathal.—

"Ask them not to keep him free" shouted Malayathal to her husband when the party had reached the outskirts of the village. "He will surely give the slip. Put on the fetters."

"Yes, the fellow will run away, if you don't bind his hands" said another in the crowd. "And then it will be impossible to catch him again."

"As if you had caught him now" said a young spirit in the crowd, the son of Raman Ambalagaran. "He let himself be caught. Otherwise you never could catch him."

Pichaimuthu obeyed the mandate of his wife. He approached the policemen and asked them to fetter Mathu's hands lest the fellow should give the slip or anything uncanny should happen. He told them that the boy possessed strange resources and they could never be too careful.

The constables therefore bound Mathu's hands with fetters.

CHAPTER XI

The Strange Encounter

Twilight had melted into moonlight. The fields and ridges that lay grim in the gloaming were lit up in subdued splendour. For miles in front of the constables and their captive and all around them the fields stretched unbroken by a road or pathway. Now and then, a double bullock cart laboured over the ridges and appeared, disappeared and reappeared in the distance and passed away to a neighbouring village. And then all around was solitary and quiet; except when, out-side the limits of the village, Bondili, the Korava, flitted across with his spouse and other apparatus of his profession and pausing at the sight of Mathu in trouble waved a finger at him and shouted: "It serves you right!"

The constables walked balancing on the ridges to avoid the prickly shrubs on the fields. Mathu followed with fettered hands. They had progressed a couple of miles from the outskirts of Nallanarikkadu and all the way they exchanged no words. To the constables the search and the final capture of the boy were nothing unusual and evoked no comments from them. They had still some miles to travel on this sandy, pathless path to reach the police station. They were consequently making haste.

Exactly two miles from Nallanarikkadu lay a fallow field known as Kalivayal or the field of Kali. No one had dared to appropriate or encroach on this field because it belonged to Goddess Kali whose title to it was evidenced by an iron rod stuck into the earth in one corner underneath a margosa tree. People of the

contiguous villages repaired here once a year to offer worship; but except on this occasion it was a deserted place.

Upon this field, lit up by the brilliant moon that was gaining in lustre every minute the constables emerged with Mathu. There was another route leading to their station in a different direction but they had chosen this as it was the shorter route. They had not walked a few steps on this field when a jackal suddenly crossed their path.

"What does the proverb say about jackal crossing your path from right to left?" asked one of the constables breaking the ice.

"It does not matter how it crosses you so long as it does not attack you" retorted the other constable, trying to laugh.

There was at first nothing unusual in the jackal crossing them except that, as the constables noted, instead of shooting into a thicket nearby at the sight of them, it chose to steal a look at them as it crossed them But more was to follow. It immediately sat on its hind-legs opposite to them and sent out a prolonged yell. This was surely a singular thing for a jackal to do. Obviously the proverb which the constables quoted ignored this third alternative open to the jackal to sit in front and howl. One of the constables at once hurled a stick at the animal. This made the jackal move away a little from their path but before they had taken a step forward they saw another jackal steal into the field. Soon the two jackals joined together and raised a howl. The constables considered this a very bad omen; not merely that, they were greatly exasperated by the audacity of the animals. They hissed at them and rushed forward to beat them; but to their dismay they saw jackals

slipping in stealthily from everwhere. In a few seconds the entire bit of land was occupied by a crowd of at least a thousand jackals which formed themselves together and surged like a rebellious army in front of the men.

This was not all. After forming themselves into a close body in front, they sat on their hind legs for sometime and howled at the moon. The constables were no doubt in a fright but they still had a firm belief that the animals would pass away if they on their part showed no sign of fright and walked forward. But they found to their horror that this would not do. The moment the men moved, the jackals, like a group of constables obeying their Head constable, made a right-about-turn and began with their hindlegs to scatter dust into their eyes.

The air became charged with dust. The men sneezed and blew their noses and shouted loudly at the crowd to preserve their courage. Mathu too sneezed. A thousand jackals scattering dust at them was no ordinary thing. But he also laughed merrily. In their anguish the constables realised that the imp did not share their fright.

The seriousness of the situation soon dawned on the police men. They considered it foolish to attack the crowd just then. Nor was it prudent to stand still; for the dust clouds became denser and the jackals came upon them closer and closer in a backward march. There was only one course left open to them. They could step out of the field and take the longer route. Without losing a moment they turned back and began to retrace their steps, each holding Mathu by his shoulder.

But the jackals were not satisfied with this confession of defeat. They obviously wanted something

else from the constables. With prolonged howls they ran and ran around the men, now coming close to their feet and almost brushing against their leg with the tufts of their tails, now moving away and dancing, as it were, in a wide circle but leaving no room for the men to pass through. In the moon light the constables could see the mischievous twinkle in their eyes and the resolute waving of their tails.

This time it was Hasty that led the vast crowd. The eager and pugnacious figure made itself felt by the constables. His springy leaps and his determined movements completely paralysed the two men. At the same time they saw Big Brother sedately moving up to Mathu and taking his place with him, practically apart from the crowd. It was obvious that he was a super-leader who had left the action in the hands of the rising generation. Just while the constables, in spite of their fright, strained their eyes through the curtain of dust to take full note of the remarkable personality of Big Brother, they were disturbed by peals of laughter. They saw it was Mathu that was laughing. But in their predicament the police men had no time to chide him for what seemed to them his meaningless hilarity.

The two men counted themselves lost. They were till now hesitating to run. For they had heard it said that it was dangerous to try to run from jackals; but now it did not matter what they did. So they ran dreading at the same time that they were sure to be pursued.

But they soon realised that they were not pursued. After they had run a little distance, they saw that the jackals crowded round their prisoner and did not bother about them at all. They really pitied the boy and blamed themselves for their inability to

help him. They imagined that Mathu would be bitten to pieces and they would hear his shrieks in a few seconds. But nothing of the kind happened. To their amazement they heard shouts of joy from him. It was now obvious to them that the boy felt himself in very pleasant company.

They climbed up a tree to have a better view and also to secure themselves from a fresh attack, for they were still not out of the danger zone. From this place of vantage they saw a sight which they could never forget and which they were never tired of relating to their comrades.

About twenty jackals moved up to Mathu and stood close together presenting a broad enough seat for him on their close-knit backs. Mathu with his fettered hands threw himself on this skinny platform and made himself comfortable. The other jackals moved forward in a sort of procession and Mathu followed on this strange conveyance.

The constables could now see why Mathu sent forth peals of laughter when they felt like weeping.

CHAPTER XII

Mathu's Parting Speech

Suppan, the blacksmith, was working in his small shed at a furious pace. It was past eight and the full moon was making the white sand milk-white outside the shed. Usually he closed his shed by sunset but on this night he had to make a departure from his usual

practice because he had undertaken to repair and deliver a cart to a big Chettiar in Great Lake early next morning. Not that he was very punctual in his engagements nor was he different from his kin in this respect. But his customer the big Chettiar was known to be a rich man; and added to this was the fact that during the last one month Suppan had no engagement of mentionable importance. His eagerness to finish the work and earn the money was therefore easily guessed by his neighbours who were not unaccustomed, now and then, to sleep to the bold music of his hammer.

Suppan had a steady hand and the people of Nallanarikkadu could tell him from his strokes at a mile's distance. Closer at hand it was easier to identify the wielder of the hammer, for invariably every stroke was accompanied by a full-mouthed and loud sound which commenced with an "ehm." at the first stroke and developed into a fluid music of measured malice.

His neighbours had slept away and none of them heard the strokes suddenly stop. But the strokes did stop abruptly and one of the "ehms." was audibly stifled and did not issue forth again.

Surely Suppan had not suddenly fallen asleep. His wife knew that he was not so infirm of purpose as to sleep over his hammer. Something happened to arrest his hammer in its downward course and to pin him to his seat in sheer astonishment.

He was seated in his palmyra shed facing the entrance. On one side of him was a basket full of charcoal and on another side a box full of tools; while in front of him just beyond the furnace lay a wooden board on which he had left his long, scaly file. Suddenly, he saw a jackal walk into his shed straight

through the entrance, approach his tool box and turn over its contents as if in search of something and then walk up to the wooden board and pick up the file lying on it.

It may be asked why Suppan remained quiet and let the jackal make the search and then walk away with the file. You must have been there with him inside the shed to appreciate his position. Big Brother was no ordinary jackal. He had a certain majestic way of doing things. When he walked into the shed openly and fearlessly through the entrance, there was something disarming in his manner. It was like a neighbour walking in to borrow a tool from him. Further, Big Brother looked at Suppan with a twinkle in his eye which had the effect of a pleasing smile. The Black-smith got the feeling that his visitor had some message for him of an urgent kind. This feeling disappeared when Big Brother squatted by the tool box and overturned the tools. It was only then that Suppan felt for the first time that he should have protested. Indeed he had been dazed by the suddenness of the arrival. He at once moved but by the time he could do anything, Big Brother had coolly walked away with the big file firmly held between his teeth.

He came out and saw the jackal speeding away into the jungle. His curiosity was roused. The behaviour of Big Brother was unlike that of any orninary jackal. Why should it require, of all things in the world, a file? How did it know that Suppan had it? It was all strange, very strange!

Suppan was not without courage. He did not at once run to his neighbours and wake them. He had strong curiosity to follow Big Brother and find out what he was going to do with his file and he did not

wish to waste time in trying to wake his neighbours. So he walked back into the shed, picked up his towel from the floor and put it on his shoulder and followed in the wake of the jackal.

Although it was a long stretch of plain land all around with but a few trees here and there, Suppan lost sight of Big Brother. But he was sure of sighting the creature somewhere. He reached a small cocoanut garden after half an hour's walk. To him in the broad moon light nothing inside this grove was visible except the white patches of moon light lying on the ground like spilt milk. Oblivious of what was inside he had almost passed into the shade when he realised that the place was not free passage for him. He realised that it was blocked by a vast gathering of jackals that presented the appearance of a big public meeting which he had once attended in one of his trips to the neighbouring town. He stepped back in amazement but not before he saw that on the opposite side of the garden in an open space where the cocoanut branches did not obstruct the flow of moon light down, there was Mathu seated. He saw the boy keeping both his hands held forward. He saw a couple of jackals working vigorously at something binding his hands. And he also saw that his audacious visitor was one of the two jackals, for he could distinguish Big Brother in any gathering of jackals by his broad back and his gentlemanly behaviour, although he had seen the animal only once and that for a few seconds in his shed and could claim no previous acquaintance with him.

Suppan was or was not observed by the jackals. It was very unlikely that he was not. But it made no difference. Suppan preferred to think that he was not observed and consequently he stepped back and reached the dark shade of a palmyra cluster. From here he

could see Mathu and the jackals. Not merely that, he could hear the grating noise of a file working on iron. That sound was unmistakable and it proceeded from where Mathu sat. This appeared to him singular but not more singular than the fact that the sound was produced by Big Brother working away at something on the hands of Mathu with the long file stolen from his smithy.

No sooner did he realise this than he moved out of his hiding and ran back; ran to his smithy and closed and locked it; ran to his wife as if he wanted to tell her something and after waking her up ran out without uttering a word to her; and ran to his neighbours one by one and cried incoherently till they thought him mad. At last with difficulty he broke the news to them and convinced them that it was not a silly dream.

The whole village was soon astir. Men, women and children gathered together and advanced to the cocoanut garden led by Suppan. Raman and Pichaimuthu improvised a few torches out of bamboo sticks stored outside their huts. The younger men in the village were given the honour of bearing the torches and like a big army moving to an attack they marched to the garden.

The nightmare of Suppan was indeed a reality; with this difference that Mathu was now on his feet and no more fettered. On seeing the army of villagers approach with torches and shouts, the jackals fled in all directions,—the villagers had never thought that there were so many jackals in their neighbourhood—and disappeared in a second.

Mathu emerged from the little garden and threw at them a few bits of iron.

"Look!" said Suppan picking them up. "As surely as I am alive, these are the broken bits of the fetters that the police men brought!".

The iron bits passed from hand to hand and were carefully examined.

"How did he manage to escape?" wondered Pichaimuthu.

"How did he manage to break the fetters?" mused Raman.

"That I can tell you" broke in the Blacksmith "The Big Jackal has really removed the fetters with the help of my file. This is a strange world we live in!"

Mathu was now standing in the clear moonlight, boldly facing the crowd. There was no need to pursue him although when they set out the people imagined they would have to. Far from trying to disappear with the jackals the boy looked at the men full in their faces for a minute and then spoke.

"You are a set of ungrateful fellows"! he shouted to them, this time throwing at Suppan the scaly file which the latter dexterously caught in the air. "You are incapable of appreciating my services. I hate you all. I hate you there in particular."

He waved his finger resolutely at Pichaimuthu.

"I have served you best" he continued. "And you would grudge me and my friends a few measures of grain. You are led by your silly wife."

Pichaimuthu stepped forward greatly offended. But Suppan seized him and held him firmly.

"Listen!" said Suppan "let us hear him through"

"I hate you all!" shouted Mathu again, throwing a few iron screws "I will not stay in your midst any longer. I will not look at you again. To-morrow I go away to Ceylon. The Kangani tells me it is a noble land. Men are not mean-minded there and their wives are not stupid like yours. I am going there to work and earn and become richer than all of you here put together. You are a set of idlers!"

So saying Mathu backed into the garden and was not seen any more. The crowd recovered from the effect of the speech and rushed into the grove. They looked for him in all directions. But he had vanished. And the vanquished men returned, with their torches extinguished by the fierce wind that blew now, pelting them with dust and stones.

CHAPTER XIII

Au Revoir

Panangadu or the Palmyra Wood is the common Railway station for a group of dozen villages including Nallanarikkadu. It is a tiny station standing in a deserted locality five miles from nearest human habitation. It consists of a few feet of cement platform and a couple of rooms all covered over by a tin sheet. The only other tenement discernible for miles around in the locality is the small house built for the station master half a furlong away.

The trains pass on this line at long intervals carrying more compartments than passengers. One

train comes up at seven in the morning from the neighbouring town, goes the full length of the line, comes down sometime later, pauses for a while at this station and then puffs away. It comes up only the next morning.

The Railway authorities change the timing on every line except this, as there is no need to change it here. This simple time-table of one train up and down every day has served the purpose of the villages admirably enough for the last twenty years. To put it plainly it makes no difference to them when the train passes, for rarely do they feel the need to travel by train.

The Station Master who served the Railway Company at the time of our story was a young man. He was ably assisted by a servant who had gone grey in his job. Both were punctually at the station this morning at the stroke of seven, for in addition to an old chair in the Station Master's room, a rickety table close to one of the walls on which stood the shelf containing the tickets and an iron bench lying on the platform outside, the station possessed an old-fashioned clock which announced in feeble voice the sluggish hours on this line. The servant at once proceeded with a flag to the line and looked out for the train; while the Station Master waited in his room for a few seconds for possible passengers. Just as he rose from his chair thinking that on this day too there was no passenger, a boy came up to the window, put his nose between the bars and wanted a ticket. He gladly issued a ticket.

Immediately he came out of his room, opened the iron gate and let the boy in. To his surprise a jackal slipped in close on the passenger's heels. He shouted to the servant and bent down to pick up a stone.

Just then something dashed in scraping against his legs. It was another jackal. In a couple of seconds jackals began to slip in from all directions, over the railway line, through the station gate and also leaping over the barbed fencing. Not one or two but a thoustnd jackals rushed into and crowded on the platform and surrounded the boy. They danced about him, frisked round him and then howled mournfully.

The Station Master realised that it was idle to attempt to drive away the animals. It was obvious to him that they had come in to give the boy a send-off. Their conduct could have no other meaning. He had no time to enquire of the boy what this meant. It remained only a minute for the train to arrive. And the one thought that tormented him was about his safety in the midst of these creatures after departure of the train with the boy.

There was not a fraction of a second to lose. He cast about for a safe place. Luckily he sighted the metal ladder intended to be used for getting up the tin-roof to light the lamp. That ladder had never been used; for that light had never been lighted in his experience. He rushed to the ladder and was up on the roof before the train puffed audibly in the distance. From here he gesticulated to his servant to do likewise.

But the servant could not follow the example of the Station Master. He was at one end of the platform and to reach the ladder he would have to walk on the backs of jackals which filled every available inch of space on the platform. He was already shaking from head to foot and crying out incoherently and miserably when the train puffed up. Like a maniac, he dashed up and without heeding the caution of the driver leaped on the foot-board of a carriage and perched himself on it.

The train passed up and returned in a few minutes. The servant had perched himself behind the Guard and was feeling quite safe. But the poor Station Master was all the while on the roof. He maintained his place on the slanting roof with great difficulty. And, he was such a dutiful man that mastering his terror he waved the flag and signalled to the train. His heroism was very much appreciated later on by those who heard of the incident.

The train now stopped. The engine driver and the Guard leaned out from their places looking aghast at the unusual gathering of jackals, and their little hero on the platform. Even the terrified servant who had now secured himself in a compartment peered through a half-open window, had a glimpse of his master on the roof, satisfied himself that the jackals were still there and no safe landing was possible and then let the shutter down.

Mathu waved to the jackals gaily in farewell and entered one of the four vacant compartments. The engine whistled and gasped and moved away carrying the guard, the driver, the station servant and Mathu. What happened after the train left was known only to the Station Master.

As soon as the train puffed down the jackals howled mournfully and pathetically like dogs passionately attached to their master. They all sat on their hind-legs and cried with up-turned faces. Then they descended from the platform, crossed the rails and slowly passed away in a procession, mourning and sobbing, into a thicket of palmyras.

Not till the last of them had disappeared did the affrighted man on the roof get down nor had he the assistance of the ladder to get down; for the jackals when they swelled on the platform had knocked it

down. So that the unfortunate man had to jump down from the roof.

When he reached the steady earth he did not pause to lock his room or to close the gate. He leaped out of the platform through the gateway like a trespasser chased by a railway servant. He leaped to the footpath leading to his house and ran in sheer fright, till he reached home.

It is reliably understood that both the Station Master and the servant were at once transferred at their request to another station.. It is equally reliably understood that they both fell seriously ill after joining their new station and took nearly a month to get over their frightening experience. But time gives new aspects to past events and it is good to learn that to-day when they relate their experience they laugh in enjoyment of the comic scene and do not tremble any more at the recollection of it as they once did.

CHAPTER XIV

The Revenge

The people of Nallanarikkadu did not take Madhavan seriously when he threatened to go away to Ceylon for good. Even if they had taken him in earnest they would not have believed that it made any difference to them. Of what use to them was this idle, mischievous urchin? It was perhaps better, considering his numerous, dangerous pranks, that he was away from them beyond the seas!

But they soon had occasion to realise that his absence was as injurious to them as his presence in their midst. A couple of days after the strange encounter in the cocoanut garden, when Pichaimuthu went to his field one morning after gulping down a few mouthfuls of ragi-porridge he saw such havoc wrought on his maize and groundnuts that, brave man as he was, he could not restrain his tears. Everywhere the crops were desolated and it was as if a herd of thousand cattle had trodden upon the tender shoots for a whole night.

It was not his crops alone that were spoiled. Every man in the village had the same tale to tell. It struck them at once that this was the result of the organised work of the malicious jackals obviously infuriated at the departure of Mathu. If the news of his departure and of the strange scene at the Panangadu Railway Station had not reached them, they would have supposed that Mathu had a hand in laying waste their lands. But the news at once reached them as well as the whole congeries of villages in the neighbourhood having been carried to them gratis by their respective postmen who learnt it from the Post Master who heard it narrated by the doctor who had attended on the poor, affrighted Station Master and had thus the privilege of hearing the first authentic version of the incident. And the people of Nallanarikkadu were therefore sure that Mathu had nothing to do with their fields this time, although their wrath against him only increased tenfold at the idea that the jackals meant to punish them for having offended him and caused his departure.

A stranger to the village would have found it difficult to fall in with this unanimous conclusion of the villagers. He would have wisely considered the various canny possibilities and ascribed the sudden

destruction of their crops to weather or pests or quality of the soil or similar reasonable causes. In fact the Zamindar who happened to visit the place just now and who was apprised by the afflicted men of their misfortune was inclined to ridicule their idea. Raman Ambalagaran, who was the loudest in relating the mournful story was even rebuked by the Zamindar for trying to deprive him of his year's share of the produce.

"Ejaman may come and see" cried Raman, pathetically stretching his hands in the direction of the devastated crops "We may lie; but the Crops that we raised and that now lie withered and scattered cannot lie."

The Zamindar was resting in his shed after a weary journey from the Railway Station. His bullocks stood outside unyoked, munching straw and tinkling in the act.

"I think this story about Mathu is the strangest story you have all invented" he said. "I wonder if such a boy ever existed. You fellows are exploiting his name to deprive me of what is due to me. This silly story has no other meaning."

The extreme injustice of this callous remark was resented by the Village Headman.

"Sir, you may doubt it when Raman says it" retorted Pichaimuthu with an attempt at dignity which ill concealed his agitation. "But can you doubt it when I say it? Are we mere children to hope to deceive you with stories? You may come and see the fields yourself. After seeing them, unless you do something to protect us from the jackals, I am afraid we will have to decide to leave this place for ever."

"Don't you call this place Nallanarikkadu"? asked the Zamindar after graciously listening to Pichaimuthu. "That means this is a place of good jackals. But you make out that they have all suddenly turned bad, although your ancestors found them good!"

The Zamindar laughed loudly in appreciation of his own witty remark.

"You may call them good or bad" said Pichaimuthu with the same attempted dignity that marked his previous speech." But this much I can tell you. Unless you shoot them all at once, we will have no peace."

"What! Do you want me to shoot Jackals!" shouted the Zamindar. "I suppose that is not one of the improvements enjoined on me by the new Act. I will not do more than what is strictly enforcible in law. Which fellow here has ever given me a grain more that he ought to? Why, as a matter of fact, since my father's death, I have been invariably receiving less than what I am entitled to. Shoot the jackals! Why, you will next ask me to shoot all the ants here lest they should spoil your crops!"

The men present received the remarks sullenly. They did not mind the want of sympathy that informed the remarks. But they did mind the incredulity of the Zamindar. Consider he might that they all wanted to deceive him. Believe he might that they were irregular in paying him his dues. But to doubt their story about Mathu and his mates was an insult they could not forgive.

Luckily for them the Zamindar could not long persist in his incredulous attitude. Before he left his camp next morning he had seen enough to disabuse his

mind of the idea that the men were either deluded or were scheming to cheat him.

He was sleeping in his shed for the night and having risen very early that day and travelled a long distance over ridges and fields, he was sleeping soundly. His cart-driver, a trusted old servant of his family, was lying on the bare earth at the entrance, to guard his master and at the same time have an eye,—for the most time it was a closed eye—on the bullocks outside and the straw heap kept for their consumption. Suddenly they were disturbed rudely by a tremendous noise close by. The Zamindar leaped out of the bamboo-cot in which he was sleeping and involuntarily rushed into the arms of his faithful servant who had stretched them out in the dark in search of his master. Both struggled out of the shed into the open air, when, in addition to the loud noise they heard in their sleep, they saw a red glare in the distance moving towards them and shortly afterwards it proved to be the light of torches carried by a crowd of men. The crowd approached them fast enough and the Zamindar recognised the faces of the village headman and his co-villagers.

"Please come with us!" shouted Pichaimuthu, profusely perspiring under the glare of the torch he held. "It is no use our staying in this village as long as this kind of thing occurs. You will soon find it a desert!"

"You are all at it, once again" yawned the Zamindar rubbing his eyes and displaying great irritation in his tone "What the hell do you want now?"

"Come and see for yourself" cried Raman Ambalagaran, waving a torch in the direction of the village.

All the crowd joined in the request and the Zemindar followed them to the village. His shed was some distance from the regular village and it was some time before they reached the homesteads.

And there the Zamindar witnessed a scene which undeniably revealed a serious state of affairs. Of course, by the time the crowd reached back, there was no jackal present near the dwelling but the Zamindar now learnt—and there was no incredulity in his manner now—that a herd of countless jackals invaded their homes, fearlessly rushed into their store rooms, looted their grains and other articles of food and killed and carried away their goats and their poultry. He learnt that a thousand jackals suddenly advanced on them, aggressively attacked them and injured their children. The women came forward and showed the Zamindar the broken pots, the ravaged stores and the injured children and then set up such a wail that the Zamindar was compelled to hurl a few abusive epithets at them to silence them effectively. And having silenced them, and having assured the men of his best support, he returned fully convinced that some drastic measure had to be adopted at once to put down this menace of the jackals.

Next morning as he drove lumbering in his cart to his bungalow, an idea occurred to him which he lost no time in carrying out. Immediately on reaching their home he ordered it to be announced by tom tom in the whole nieghbourhood that he would pay a handsome reward of ten rupees to any one for every fifty jackals killed by him during the next one month.

CHAPTER XV

Did Men come from Monkeys?

It is not as well known as it should be that, alone among lesser creatures, jackals are the most organised and disciplined. It is, no doubt, quite well known that they are unsurpassed for cunning but this exhibits a partial or prejudiced view on the part of man who has yet to realise that the social and gregarious qualities of jackals are at least as remarkable as his own. They have a philosophy of life and a set of theories as regards their own biological evolution and high destiny little inferior to ours.

It is necessary to refer in particular to one singular theory in which the jackals of Nallanarikkadu passionately believed. It is that man evolved out of the jackal and not out of the monkey as men unwisely imagined. They felt greatly aggrieved with man for forgetting this fact. With bitter feelings of jealousy, not unmixed with contempt, they saw man fondling monkeys. To their amazement, they saw the image of the monkey in the temples built by man; and there was not so much as a stone set up to consecrate the fact that man was the offspring of jackals, the most rational and intelligent of creatures.

Hasty, whose blossoming mind was being fed on this theory, was one with other youngsters in denouncing the false idea of man.

"Do they think monkeys are more intelligent?" Hasty shouted.

All the jackals had gathered together at their annual feast on the bed of a spacious lake which was just now dry. It was a full moon night and for miles and miles the jackals appeared the monarchs of all they surveyed. In view of the feast, they had assembled quite a variety of river and lake crabs, fowls from the neighbouring homesteads, and sumptuous pieces of stolen goat flesh. But crabs were their staple food. The simple device by which they secure an ample supply of crabs for their dinner is little known except to the crabs who do not survive to relate the experience to others. If one is eager to know something of this habit of jackals, one should go to a lake like this on such a night as this. It is a simple method they adopt but they provide in the act an engaging sight. Each jackal first breathes into a crab-hole. Then he shuts the hole with his forepaw just for a second. Then he turns round and thrusts his bushy tail inside and pokes and pokes and churns and churns till the overpowered crab after exhausting his weapon of offence and defence clings to the hairs of the tail and is pulled out. And then outside the hole, the crab with inexhaustible hope makes one last effort to escape pursued and finally swallowed by his agile foe.

Imagine a thousand jackals assembled on a lake-bed, each squatting at a crab-hole, tail thrust in and poking and churning and spinning round and round, till you forget they are living creatures and believe them mere mechanical contrivances or somewhat like spindles or toys propelled by a big motor. This was the sight that would have greeted you on the night of the feast, if you had gone there before they had settled down for the kill.

Hasty and his group had had more than a mouthful of toddy in the evening. This is a rare beverage for jackals and quite unknown to the jackals of this

place until Hasty had chanced upon a method of getting it. One morning he observed a man getting up a cocoanut tree with a pot tied to his back and in the evening he saw the same vessel thrown down by a monkey. At once, with his incorrigible curiosity Hasty rushed up to it and licked all that remained in the broken pot. It was fully fermented stuff and it went to his head. What fun the other jackals made of him when he returned home tipsy! He swore he would never again go near the pot thrown down by the drunken money. But obviously he was not sober when he swore. The very next evening he was faced with the tempting liquid in a very unexpected manner. He and his group were emerging on a foot-path near a big cocoanut garden when all of a sudden they smelt toddy. A lone toddy tapper was trotting home, as he usually does, with two foaming pots of toddy dangling at the two ends of a bamboo stick resting heavily on his shoulder. They dashed up and squatted in front of him. After a poor effort to drive them, the tapper abandoned the pots and ran away. Hasty and his friends drank to their hearts' content and thereafter the younger jackals turned toddy addicts.

But it was not every day that they could attack the toddy-tapper. Especially after this daring attack by the jackals, the tappers never came alone and they came suitably armed. How were these misguided jackals to satisfy their impossible desire? It was now that the leadership of Big Brother was found necessary. Big Brother was himself a teetotaller but the rash young ones were greatly upset over the problem and for their sake the philosopher had to stir out. He did not tell them what he was going to do, but when he succeeded in getting for them what they wanted their joy knew no bounds and they carried him on their shoulders.

What Big Brother did was this. He went to the foot of a cocoanut tree and stood there with up-turned face. At the top of the tree was a monkey meddling with a toddy pot.

"Good evening" said Big Brother, wagging his bushy tail.

The monkey looked down in sheer contempt and did not care to answer. He had just succeeded in removing the pot from the stumpy spathe and holding it with both his hands was sipping out of it the delicious drink. How could Big Brother expect the monkey to think from that dizzy height the poor jackals below?

"You are too proud to-day" said Big Brother again; "or are you hopelessly drunk like your offsprings the men there in the villages?"

"Creech! Creech!" shouted the monkey warning the jackal to keep quiet.

"Now tell me, why do they say that men came from you monkeys?" said Big Brother. "Are you superior to us? Let me see! Can you talk like Man?"

"Creech! Creech!" shouted the monkey.

"Now, that is not at all like Man" persisted Big Brother. "Let me see whether you can at least walk like Man on two legs."

Big Brother knew that the monkey could do this. Still he challenged him to do it in the hope that in the act he might drop the pot. Too tickled to catch the mischievous purpose of the jackal, the monkey demonstrated that he could walk like man. He ran up and down the supple swaying branch twice on his hind legs. But Big Brother was disappointed, for the monkey held the pot tight all the while.

"Well" said Big Brother undaunted. "No doubt you walk just like man. But can you fold your arms just as men do in the villages to greet each other? I am afraid you will fail there."

The monkey eagerly held up his arms to satisfy the jackal but this time forgot the pot which fell down and broke. The toddy was spilled all over the ground. All the jackals except Big Brother crowded together and licked and licked the ground wet with toddy till they turned giddy.

Thereafter baiting the monkey became the frequent pastime of the jackals. They ran up to the trees whenever they saw monkeys meddling with pots. They howled and cajoled and threatened till the pot was dropped. Very often they succeeded in getting their fill.

Naturally, Hasty had a poor opinion of monkey and he could hardly contain himself when it was stated that men seriously believed this nonsense about their descent from monkeys.

"Do they think monkeys are more intelligent?" Hasty therefore asked at this gathering as stated above.

"They know the monkeys are not as intelligent as we are" said Big Brother soberly munching. "But their movements and limbs are very like those of man. We, however, are different."

"Do you, then, mean to say that man came from them?" put in Hasty. He was so enraged and jealous at the idea that he almost let a crab sting the roof of his mouth.

"I do not say that" replied Big Brother holding with his paw a big crab that tried to slip into a hole. "But you must remember that man himself is not equal to us in intelligence. That is why he does not ascribe too much intelligence to his supposed ancestor. He is content to descend from a silly monkey that drops the pot at a word from you or me!"

Big Brother had not finished when all of a sudden a terrific noise broke on them followed by a cloud of smoke. There was a mournful howl by one of the jackals as it fell down dead. Big Brother and others rushed to its aid when again the sound repeated itself. It is true that the jackal of the palmyra wood is not frightened by the clatter of palmyra leaves in the wind. But this noise they heard was different. Soon it became apparent that the noise proceeded from a weapon held by a man in the distance who had obviously seen them and who had come to kill them. Their worst fears were confirmed when they saw that another man standing nearby and giving directions was Bondili, their ancient enemy. They ran and dispersed in all directions leaving behind their choicest dishes untouched; but not before a dozen of them had fallen including Longface, the wife of Big Brother.

The two men ran up and counted the number of jackals killed. It was exactly a dozen of them.

"Again I have missed Him" said Bondili disappointedly. "That fat jackal with the broadest back I have ever seen! How I wish we had hit him!"

He drew up the animals together and lifted them. All of a sudden he screemed and threw them down. One of the jackals had just enough life lingering in it to bite a little flesh off his waist.

It was Longface. She had her revenge as befitted the spouse of a leader.

CHAPTER XVI

Damodar Again

That the Zamindar of Nallanarikkadu had set a prize on the lives of jackals and that jackal-hunting had become the raging occupation of men who happened to own guns in these villages received due publicity in the city. Indeed the news had serious repercussions there. At once some men vigorously protested against this silly eradication of wild life in the country and applied to the District Magistrate for immediate action to preserve the animals. Another set of men were prepared to concede that if jackals in particular places were really so troublesome or peculiar as alleged they might be killed, but pleaded that such drastic action should be restricted to such animals as were proved to cause trouble; for it was conceivable that there were innocent ones among them and it was but just that ten bad jackals escaped rather than that one innocent creature was put to death. A third group of men ridiculed the maudlin sentiments of the critics and pointed out (without the least respect for sentiment of any kind) that jackals were always creatures of ill omen and it was no use defending them.

It was in combating the views of the so called anti-sentimentalists that Mr. Damodar once again emerged into prominence. That worthy gentelman after the well merited publicity accorded to his scheme by discerning newspapers had sunk into silence and obscurity. But now the outrageous move to extirpate the jackals of Nallanarikkadu forced him to speak again without fear or favour. It appeared just like one of those typical acts by which a decadent race

might disgrace their last days on this planet. He lost no time in making his views known. He printed at his own expense and distributed on a large scale pamphlets extolling the qualities of the jackals of Nallanarikkadu. He recalled to the public the incident with which these good jackals were associated and in the light of which he had adumbrated his widely known scheme for domesticating jackals in general for agricultural purposes. He regretted that his ideas were ridiculed by the short-sighted members of the Commission. If the scheme had been accepted the present famine that threatened them would have been rendered impossible. He concluded by suggesting that behind this move to kill the jackals was the hidden hand with which he had always had to contend, the hand of the enemy of agriculturists.

It is not possible to say whether it was the vigorous plea voiced by some of the men for the preservation of wild life or the policy advocated by the sentimentalists of discriminate slaughter or the deluge of pamphlets with which Mr. Damodar overwhelmed the public that weighed in influencing the authorities to decide to intervene at this stage. A week of slaughter of jackals had proceeded apace when suddenly the Zamindar was served with a notice calling on him to stop it at once. It was easier for the Zamindar to start the slaughter than to stop it; for he found that even after announcing the prohibitory order widely and informing in person as many as he could, the hunt continued and demands for the prize offered by him did not stop and it took nearly a week to enforce the prohibition. The worst offender was, of course, the Narikkoravan who saw the prospect of a lucrative trade in jackal hides prematurely spoiled by the ill-timed, contradictory order issued just now.

Rightly or wrongly the belief was widely held that this was a triumph of Damodar's efforts. The Zamindar swore that it was clearly the mischief of that back-biting madcap as he irreverently called the good old man. He regretted that he had made the mistake of receiving him with honour in his bungalow during that mad excursion of his into the village. Mr. Damodar himself was fully persuaded that his ideas relative to jackals were gradually taking root. Judging from the mass of literature he had turned out on the subject, this was not a baseless claim. Surely, there had been no public cause so ardently and steadfastly pursued in recent times as the protection and domestication of jackals.

This measure of success encouraged him to go further in the matter. It did him credit to leave the town at once and settle in the village of Nallanarikkadu. It did him credit to realize that rather than adumbrate a scheme on paper it became him to put it into practice. In fact the good man blamed himself for having idled his time so long in the city and so despite the protests and entreaties of his only son, a clerk in the Collector's office, who was so vexed with his father's ardour in public affairs that he freely told his neighbours that he was turning mad, he packed his things and repaired to the village. But he took care before starting to issue a clear statement announcing a ten years' programme in agriculture to avoid the famine that stared them in the face.

It so chanced that just at this time Pichaimuthu, having fallen on evil days, was casting about for a purchaser of his lands. Time was when he could have sold them for a fabulous price. Had he but thought of disposing of them soon after his illness when the news had spread far and wide that in his village the jackals had made common cause with men and were of

unexpected assistance to them, had he but shrewdly guaged the situation then and advertised his lands for sale,the lands in which Mathu and his mates had launched their experiment in agriculture,—he would surely have made his fortune. But he had lost the chance ; and now Mr. Damodar mad as he was over this particular village and drawn irresistably by the lure of this particular land, offered a price for it which seemed very low to the village Headman. His wife, however, counselled him to be wise and have done with it and at last Mr. Damodar set himself to inaugurate his scheme on the very piece of land which, to borrow the phraseology of his famous memorandum was sanctified by the good will of the jackals and the practical genius of Mathu.

He did not allow grass to grow under his feet. Immediately he employed a number of Narikkoravans, whose familiarity with the jackalworld was well known, to train and harness jackals. In fact he took the trouble of interviewing every one of them in person and subjecting each to a lengthy cross examination before employing them. His decision about each man was largely guided by this one principle that, as far as possible, he should have known Mathu or known about him and should have seen at least one of the jackals attached to Mathu.

"I know one particular jackal, perhaps the very leader of all jackals in these villages" asserted one of the Narikkoravas, no other than Bondili, the arch enemy of the creatures. "I have not seen a fatter or a more stately fellow in all my life. I had very nearly bagged him on two occasions. On the first occasion, that infermal boy Mathu rescued him. On the second occasion, the Zamindar himself came with me to shoot but missed the best hide in the world by sheer folly."

As Damoder evinced keen interest in the story, the Korava related all that he saw on the moonlight night.

"He missed because he would not believe till it was too late that what he saw before him on the lake bed were jackals. He swore that I was a fool and that they were parts of some big machine, perhaps dropped from the skies. By the time he saw his error it was too late. They had all escaped and I got just a few lean hides for my trouble."

Here he deliberately omitted the fact that Long-face had bitten him as he shrewdly felt that Damodar might dismiss him on the ground that he was not dexterous enough in handling jackals.

"Now" said Damodar after hearing him through, "You should hereafter change your ways and your outlook. The reason why you failed with jackals and why Mathu succeeded is that you hated them and Mathu loved them. The secret is love. Jackals are our friends, nay our saviours. Befriend them and do not value them just for their hide".

Damodar was sure he was uttering grand sentiments which were already reforming and revolutionising the view of the rustic jackal killer. In fact he recorded later at night in his diary that the reformation of the Korava was the good beginning he had made. But some of the children of the village not to speak of grown up men who were present in a crowd at this conversation thought they saw the Korava distinctly wink and make grimaces at the old man.

"It must be your aim to secure some of the jackals you had seen with Mathu" said Damodar descending to business. "That will make our job easier."

The Korava assured him that nothing was easier than this.

So Bondili was at once selected mainly for his proven acquaintance with Mathu's mates. In fact, the very next day he furnished further indubitable proof by actually producing one of them before Damodar. It was, no doubt, a lean and hungry-looking jackal but Bondili asserted vehemently that it was the same as the fat one he had spoken of, since emaciated by a long fast after Mathu's exit, and he had no doubt that the poor, faithful creature would be induced to break his fast and assume his original size if set on the object dear to Mathu's heart.

Bondili himself was able to select his assistants. Damodar was so pleased with his efficiency and promptness in doing things, not to speak of his practical and theoretical knowledge of jackals that he entrusted the task to him with confidence. Bondili and his companions immediately set to work to train and harness jackals. A dozen model jackals were first trained for their new, momentous role. In a few days the entire district was agog with the news. From far and near people came to see the Koravas at work on the jackals. Every one was convinced that the new scheme would succeed. In fact, there were gloomy faces at the weekly cattle shandies. It was obvious to them that the time was not far off when their cattle would pass out of vogue in their traditional occupation. They would soon be holding not cattle but jackal shandies.

At last the Koravas declared that the model jackals were ready. Mr. Damodar who had engaged them only with a view to use their traditional knowledge of the creatures and who considered it undesirable to keep them on for ever lest a new class of middlemen in agriculture should spring up discharged them at once and decided to yoke the jackals himself.

Of what happened on the historic occasion of the first, personal handling of the jackals by Mr. Damodar, there is no direct evidence. Mr. Damodar's Diary which usually contains a full and faithful record of happenings every day of his life is conspicuously silent as to what happened on this important day. All that is vouchsafed to us is that the very evening he had to be removed to the near-by rural dispensary in which it is recorded that he was treated for a whole week for multiple injuries on his person. It is also alleged by the inhabitants of the two cottages near the model farm that in the afternoon they heard a distinct human voice crying and shouting for help, but by the time they could make for the field they saw Damodar reaching his hut and bolting the door from inside. In any event it is certain that the estimable gentleman never again returned to the village to resume his good work.

When today, of an evening, he passes along the streets of his native town with his impressive pith-turban bright with lace and white upper cloth and, what is more important, with his well-known walking stick tipped in silver with the tiny figure of an equally well-known animal, easily recognisable by the bushy tail, few venture to ask him about his scheme. But irreverent men are not wanting to allege that those who suggest loudly in his hearing either that he was bitten by his jackals or that he gave up his famous scheme as chimerical must be prepared to be dealt with by him just as it is imagined he was dealt with by the jackals. But, honestly speaking, he had only suspended his scheme and any day one had to be prepared for the Jackal Age in Agriculture.

CHAPTER XVII

In the Same Boat

The first Zamindar of Nallanarikkadu was a self-made man. He had suffered and endured greatly before fortune began to smile on him. He had gone to sleep on empty stomach many nights both in his boyhood and in his teens. And when at last the jade started smiling, he could hardly recognise it as a smile; for it happened under the most depressing circumstances. Tired of making a living by running errands for the big men of the village, driven to despair by the death of his mother whom he was unable to support and who died almost of hunger and in a huff with the entire world around him which he found so unfriendly he enrolled himself as one of the coolies recruited for a tea estate in Ceylon. How was he to know that this was the lucky day for him? Nor did he know it till, a couple of years later, his European employer singled him out as a sincere and useful worker and made him one of his recruiting agents. He returned home a rich man in a few years and purchased a Zamin.

But the second Zamindar of Nallanarikkadu, the present one whom we have met already, was an easy going man. He was born a Zamindar and lived like one. It was not necessary for him to work to live. But there was one thing which he felt bound to do. His father on his death-bed had extracted from him a promise that he would not fail to visit Ceylon at least once a year to look after his properties there; and although he was regularly receiving through his agents the revenue from Ceylon and despite his disinclination to do work in any form, it must be said to his credit, that he respected the last wishes of his father and visited the island once a year.

And now as he boarded the Indo-Ceylon Express and took his seat in a second class compartment, gazing out of the window at the paddy fields rolling by, he wondered why his father thought it necessary to impose this condition on him. For his part, he loved going to Ceylon. The little Island with its varied scenery and population cast a spell on him. It was so unlike the dull, drab, colourless life down there in Nallanarikkadu or Ettukkottai even with its Pinjrapole Club. His lovely mansion in Columbo constructed by his father at great cost and admired even by the rich planters was not the least important of the charms beckoning him to Ceylon. And, above all, his mind travelled far in advance of the Indo-Ceylon-Express to Colombo Fort Station where a crowd of servants and agents would respectfully wait on him on alighting and run obsequiously up and down the platform to please him. Would he not bind himself irrevocably by the same promise ten thousand times over again?

The train reached Danushkodi before sun-down. And as he got out of his compartment he noted with surprise that his fellow passenger in the compartment adjoining his was a small boy, almost an urchin. Just then the Station Master seeing the ill-clad boy in the upper class compartment walked up to him and demanded his ticket. To the surprise of the Zamindar and the Station Master, the boy proudly held out his ticket.

"Where do you go?" asked the Station Master.

"To Ceylon," replied the boy.

"Then you must get down here, Don't you see the board there? This is Danushkodi"

"Yes. I must get down at Danushkodi, I was told so" said the boy and came down.

Later in the evening when the Zamindar was on board "Goschen" bound for Talamannar, he noted with unconcealed surprise that his companion was the same little boy.

"You are sure you have the right ticket?" he enquired.

"I suppose you are sure of yours" returned the boy with unbounded pride in his voice.

"Where do you come from"?

"From Nallanarikkadu."

What! Do you mean to say you came now straight from there!"

"Yes."

"May I know your name?" asked the Zamindar struck at the boy's reticence and pride.

"Mathu, they call me. But my real name is Madhavan."

The Zamindar started in horror. To him the name of Mathu was associated with jackals. Though he had not seen him even once, he had before his mind's eye an image of the boy. It was a grotesque and bizarre image of an ugly and misshapen urchin. But the Mathu he had discovered now was quite a normal boy looking as common as any other boy. Even so he could not forbear from thinking that Mathu was again out for some mischief. He knew the story of a vessel drowning through the pranks of a beggar and his monkey. Mathu with his thousand jackals, he thought, could easily drown "Goschen".

But Mathu did not bother about what the Zamindar thought. He knew the Zamindar well and he knew that his presence there would affect the Zamindar considerably. He was self-conscious to that extent. But what did it matter to him? He was proud of the chance God gave him. After leaving the village he was forced to stay in Tanjore for a number of days. His employer delayed sending him up for some reason unaccountable to him. He saw with a sinking heart other coolies despatched to Ceylon every day. Why was he alone kept back? The thought was so distressing that he fell ill and had to be removed to hospital. The illness did not last long and as soon as he recovered he heard with joy the news that the local agent had been asked to send him at once and accord him special treatment during travel in view of his state of health.

That is how he came to travel by Second Class to Danushkodi and found himself in the same berth on board the "Goschen" with the Zamindar of Nallanarikkadu.

CHAPTER XVIII

Mr. Madhavan Kangani

It is not proposed in these pages to chronicle the doings of Mathu at Ceylon. The materials available in this connection present a few yawning gaps. But there is little doubt that in fullness of time when the missing links are recovered the total picture of the obscure boy that emerges will provide an interesting example of adventure and enterprise.

In the meanwhile it is sufficient to state that in the years that elapsed after the Goschen conveyed the Zamindar and Mathu to Ceylon, Mathu had gradually ceased to be the boy that he was and had turned quite a grown-up man. This might appear nothing but natural but the same could not be said of the fact that just now he had become the Zamindar of Nallanarikkadu!

This transformation was brought about by Mathu's unremitting zeal in his work in Ceylon which raised him high in the esteem of his employer and by the unbounded folly of the second Zamindar of Nallanarikkadu. A few years after his arrival in Ceylon Mathu rose from the ranks of mere coolies to the coveted position of a recruiting agent well-known in Tamil country as Kangani. In this post he had numerous opportunities for distinguishing himself in the eyes of the European planters who took to him favourably and contributed largely to his progress in affluence. Correspondingly swift was the fall of the Zamindar. Though he had felt that his father's dying injunction that he should visit Ceylon every year, at least once, was superfluous still as time passed he failed to obey it. Love of ease and the flagitious counsels of dubious companions wrought his ruin; he received less and less money from Ceylon; his expenses grew more and more; till at last his properties in Tanjore District and in Ceylon became over-mortgaged.

At last when his affairs reached a crisis the Zamindar began to cast about for a purchaser of his Zamindari including his palatial mansion. Hearing about Mathu's growing prosperity and influence and having picked up some degree of friendship with the once awkward boy, he started negotiation with him for the sale of his properties. To his surprise Mathu

was not only in a position to pay the price he wanted but was also willing to agree to this curious condition that the Zamindar should be allowed to live in the estate house as a tenant as long as he lived. The unfortunate Zamindar, however, did not long survive this unpleasant change in his affairs ; and on receipt of information of his passing away, Mathu entered the place as a full-fledged Zamindar.

But he did not come alone. With him came his adored wife whom he called Madhavi but whose real name was Miss Ingles. Miss Ingles was the only daughter of a once rich planter in Ceylon who felt attracted to the sprightly, young Mathu and married him in the teeth of opposition from other planters.

With them came their little son, a mischievous rogue whom they called Kittoo.

It must be added that as Mathu is not now the old awkward boy with whom we are familiar but a handsome, young man, a rare product of Nallanarikkadu,—we might almost say an exotic—he will resent nothing more than the ugly contraction of his beautiful name, Madhavan. He must therefore be called by his full name hereafter.

Mr. Madhavan Kangani as he now preferred to style himself signalised his return to his native village and his entry into his estate by a grand feast to which he invited the elite of the whole Tanjore District. This event was celebrated a few weeks after his actual arrival in the village. Inspite of the fact that Nallanarikkadu is an out-of-the way village far away from bus and rail route, still, nearly all the distinguished personages in the district to whom invitations were extended took the trouble of attending the function. It is needless to enumerate the big men that came, but one particular visitor compels mention.

It was Mr. Damodar. Those who saw the senile form of this estimable gentleman tottering up the long avenue leading to Madhavan's bungalow little suspected the noble cause that drew him hither at this ripe, old age. To the good, old man this was nothing short of a pilgrimage. He was now an Honorary Magistrate, appointed to the post in recognition of his meritorious work in the field of agriculture and of his peculiar contributions to the orientation of old and unhelpful methods of cultivation. He had enough energy in him to jump at the name of Nallanarikkadu printed in the invitation and with eyes suffused with tears of gratitude, he once again saw the old vision of a team of domesticated jackals going up and down and round and round the paddy fields of the district bringing forth two blades of grass where only one was growing.

It is not necessary to describe in detail the happy function that filled the whole neighbourhood with delight. It little differed from any of the best feasts described in the best books hitherto written; and nothing that can be said here is likely to add to the lively picture that rises before the mind's eye, especially in days when austerity measures enforced by authorities render such functions more and more scarce.

But one important event must be recorded. After the guests partook of sweet jack-fruits and tender palmyra fruits which were distributed at the end to satisfy an old custom in the locality, old Mr. Damodar tottered up to Mr. Madhavan Kangani and removing his lace-turban and flourishing it in the air uttered a few words blessing the host. Mr. Madhavan being an utter stranger to this well-meaning gentleman turned to his agents to know who he was. His agents were equally perplexed and they pored over their list of invitees in vain to discover his identity.

"I gathered outside that you are the same as that dear boy called Mathu" exclaimed Mr. Damodar. "You are dearer to me than my son."

Madhavan sat up at these words.

"In fact every one in the village must adore you for the novel use you found for the jackals," continued the old man.

"May I know who you are?" asked Madhavan.

"I am called Damodar" replied the old man. "I am an ardent follower of yours in agriculture. I gave of my very best to domesticate jackals and harness them for our use. I purchased the very land of your Village Headman, on which you demonstrated your wise plan and I carried on my experiment here. Now that you have come back, I shall see the success of the scheme before I die. The age of bullocks has gone for ever! That of jackals has succeeded!"

When Damodar gave out his name the diligent agents of Madhavan once again scoured for the name in their list and at last found it. But their perplexity still remained for their list described him as follows:

"Mr. Damodar, Sub Inspector of Police, Ettukkottai."

By the time Damodar finished his oration, all the guests assembled there had begun to evince keen interest in him. There was pin-drop silence. Encouraged by this, the old man continued his oration enlarging on the qualities of jackals and the infinite possibilities they offered in the improvement of agriculture. The frequent and loving reference to jackals in his speech puzzled the audience, chief among them being Madhavan's wife.

"What the deuce does he want?" she cried to her husband. "Is he mad?"

But Madhavan was silent. He stood like a statue gazing fixedly out of the window.

"Why don't you speak?" shouted Madhavi, shaking Madhavan violently. This too failed to evoke any answer from him. In sheer fury, she was about to shake him up again when he sank into her hands like one unconscious.

CHAPTER XIX

Old familiar faces

For a whole week following the grand festival, Madhavan remained in a kind of melancholy. The many felicitations he received both here and from abroad did not seem to enthuse him. Mrs. Madhavan was naturally perturbed over the state of his health and took every care to cheer him up. At the end of a week he showed signs of reviving sprightliness at which she felt happy and thought there was an end of all her trouble.

It was a full-moon night. After a week of tiring experience, Madhavi was soundly asleep. Kittoo lay on his tiny bed, lightly drawing his breath. But Madhavan lay awake, tossing on his bed. He yawned loudly and murmured frequently, disappointed with the defaulter, Sleep. At last in sheer exasperation, he rose and moved to the balcony.

It must be said that this bungalow of Madhavan was one of the marvels of the whole district. This was his addition to the estate, built in up-to-date style with rare materials procured by him at prodigious expense from Ceylon. Although men in the neighbouring towns wondered why he lavished so much money on a village residence, the people of the village took it as a compliment to them and as a token of his attachment to the scenes of his boyhood.

From this highly ornamental balcony the construction of which he had specially supervised, he gazed on the grand moon-lit scene below. From here he commanded a magnificent view of the vast country in front of him. He saw the large tract of ploughed-up fields with the glittering channel newly dug up cutting across in one straight line. The scent of neem and mango trees thickly bordering his spacious compound was wafted to him by every stir of breeze. The long avenue leading to his compound was planted with jack trees in two straight rows outtopped at regular intervals by tall, slender areca palms. The numerous flower pots and plants and creepers down below carefully arranged with an eye to nice shades of chromatic contrast offered a pleasant sight. The difficulty of procuring water even for essential purposes in this area did not baffle Madhavan, when he set up half a dozen water spouts in his spacious garden, although they seldom spouted water.

In fact the entire scene below him on this night was such as to make him feel complacent. Yet as he stood and gazed, strange thoughts of boyhood flitted across his mind. Distant recollections of magic-bound days thrilled him through and through. He stood in a deep reverie from which he was disturbed by a howl which was at once familiar and unfamiliar to him.

"Ooh! Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!"

The monosyllabic utterances that surged up to him in quick succession cast a spell on him. Like one in a dream who wishes to move but feels glued, he saw below an increasing crowd of jackals assembling exactly in front of him. He did not seem to feel hurt when they dashed into his compound upsetting many a rare pot or vase though every day his servants carried on a battle royal with the village boys who regularly invaded his garden to steal flowers and fruits.

He looked below at the crowd intently. Was it his fancy or was it a fact that each of these creatures looked up at him with a twinkle in its eye? How did they know that he was there and that he still felt drawn to them?

As in a dream, with unwilling steps and conflicting thoughts, he felt himself getting down the stairs. A strange force that bridged in a trice the wide gulf made by years drew him once more to these creatures.

Unconsciously, as if it was ever thus and ever so natural to happen, he was once more in their midst. Once more they received him with unaccountable gratitude. A hundred bushy tails wagged for him again in welcome. Once more on the skinny seat of their united backs, he rode that night in bewitching moon-light.

In the meanwhile before break of dawn, Madhavi woke up. She realised that her husband was not in his bed. This was unusual, for Madhavan was a late riser and especially so for the past many days. She rose and looked out of the window; and down there to her surprise she saw Madhavan hastening in the distance towards the house. He came up fast and practically ran into the hall upstairs, panting for breath. Without a word, he threw himself on his bed.

"You ought not to go out like this" said Madhavi. "What took you out? You could have called me!"

Madhavan uttered no word. She went near him and found him fast asleep. Puzzling as his behaviour was since recently, this bit was more than she could endure. A thousand thoughts crossed her mind. Was it possible that he no longer loved her? Being self-willed and quick-tempered, she thought that this was the limit. Surely she would be happier elsewhere.

But this feeling of exasperation was transitory. She saw enough of him in the course of the following

day to be convinced that he was the same dear Madhavan she had first seen in Ceylon and she was once again happy. At night she took particular care of him and saw to it that he slept before she closed her eyes. What he needed was good rest Perhaps Ceylon was a more suitable climate for him and she decided to propose to him next morning that they might go to Ceylon just for a month.

She had been thinking about this proposed visit to Ceylon and planning for it in her mind so ardently that the idea persisted even after she had slept away. She dreamt that they were on their journey and actually sighted the dear, familiar shore, when their ship was blown up from below and they were all sinking down the sea helplessly.

The shrieks and wails of sinking men and women rudely disturbed her and she started from her bed. She stood and rubbed her eyes and made sure that it was all a dream. Suddenly she discovered that Madhavan was not in his bed. The joy of the realisation that the vivid ship-wreck she had gone through was but a dream was at once dashed down by the discovery of her husband's absence.

She saw from the clock on the wall that it was 2 A. M. Surely it was an unusual hour to be out. She moved to the window and gazed and gazed at the vast moon-lit area. She had stood thus for an hour when it occurred to her that she might go down and see if he was anywhere there. But he was not to be found. With tears in her eyes and with the desperate resolve to go away from him as early as she could she ran upstairs and threw herself on the bed. She purposely lay awake to see when he returned. This time she was determined to demand an explanation from him.

Madhavan returned well before the break of dawn. Moon-light still streamed through the window and flooded a portion of the bed in which he had been sleeping. He hurried to his bed and threw himself on it.

"Surely you must tell me what all this means," cried Madhavi rising and sitting up. "I cannot stand this any longer."

The reply of Madhavan was to beckon her to be silent.

"Don't you try to fool me!" shouted Madhavi. "I tell you I cannot stand this. If you don't like me, you had better tell me so. I have people to take care of me. I am going away this very minute."

She rose to go. Madhavan ran to her and begged her to stop.

"For Heaven's sake, wait till morning," he begged. "I shall tell you every thing in the morning. I am too tired now."

His words sounded earnest and his beseeching form beside her was once again reassuring. She let him sleep and in the morning heard all from him As he went on recounting to her his experience, her incredulity slowly vanished. She saw that there was no basis for her jealousy. But the feeling of estrangement increased. A gulf suddenly yawned between them. She felt that she was out of place in the midst of so much that was uncanny and weird. Life would soon grow intolerable. She therefore decided to run away leaving Kittoo, too, behind.

CHAPTER XX

Madhavi's Flight

On the following night when the hour arrived for Madhavan to walk out to join the jackals, he battled with heroic strength against the instinct in his blood. Things had reached a stage in his relationship with his wife when it was necessary for him to act bravely and master his base craving for the company of jackals. It looked so easy to stop away and quite ignore the call of the jackals; and yet he felt their call work like magic on him every time.

This night he did succeed. In vain sounded the "Oohs" in his ears. He resolutely shut his ears and wrapped himself in his blanket. For a moment, it looked as though his resolution would ooze out and he would rush down in a kind of frenzy. But he resisted and he looked forward to being rewarded in the morning by the smiles and congratulations of his wife.

Here he was destined to be disappointed. He was sound asleep after his tiring fight against the call of the jackals. It was still an hour before dawn and in his exhaustion he would have slept on till late in the morning. But he was all of a sudden roused by the screams of his son Kittoo. He rose and called his wife; when his son sitting on the edge of his small cot screamed out that his mother had gone away.

The truth slowly dawned on Madhavan. She had really run away. The heartless woman had deserted not only her husband, but also the dear little boy. In his agony he had the fairness to recognize that he was the cause for what had happened. Sympathy with her struggled against his rage at her action. A woman might stand a bad husband, but who would stand the jackals in him? Still, justified as she was in feeling horrified, she might have given him a little time to get round, at least for the sake of Kittoo whom she loved.

"I pulled her by the saree" wept Kittoo. "I begged her to stop. I ran with her downstairs. But she pushed me away and closed the door on me."

The boy wept. Madhavan could not resist tears. He held Kittoo with both hands and hugged him to his breast.

"Did she tell you nothing, nothing at all?" asked Madhavan. "Did she not tell you where she was going?"

"'Before I hear the jackals I shall go away,' she said," replied Kittoo. "I am away from you, Kittoo, for ever. But we may meet in the years to come!?"

"How heartless!" sobbed Madhavan. They were sobbing to each other when they heard a commotion down below. There was a knock at the door. Madhavan rushed down and opened. At first he saw his bandy driver standing close to the door. In the moon-light, Madhavan saw him trembling all over. Before he could speak a word to his affrighted driver, Madhavi rushed into his arms.

"Save me from the jackals!" she shrieked. "I will never go away from you. I swear I will not. But for Heaven's sake do not set those wicked things on me!"

Madhavan comforted her and took her upstairs. There, after a little rest and after being assured a hundred times that jackals could not come upstairs, she disclosed to him what had happened after she left the house. She confessed it was wicked of her to have thought of leaving them. But she could not help being horrified at his story and so she resolved to go away. She had already tipped the driver and he was ready outside at the appointed hour. But at the last moment Kittoo woke up and very nearly upset her calculations. At last she disentangled herself from

him and rushed into the carriage. The bulls dashed fast towards the Railway Station five miles away. She had not travelled half a mile when the driver saw crowds of jackals surrounding the bandy. After sometime it became impossible to proceed. The jackals began to attack the bulls in an organised manner. In sheer terror, the driver crouched inside the carriage. But she made light of the obstruction. She snatched the whip from him and jumped out. She was so impatient to reach the station and make good her escape that she threw all consideration of personal safety to the winds.

It was a thrilling scene, indeed, that she described; Madhavi trying to lash her way through with courage in her hands and the jackals eluding her and closing in on her from the rear. Quick and supple as she was, she realised that she had to reckon with at least a thousand jackals who seemed to be trained storm troopers. They acted with extraordinary team-spirit. At last she found it impossible to move in any direction. She was hemmed in on all sides. In her terror at this moment, it struck her as extraordinary that the jackals did not bother about the bulls. They seemed to focuss all their attention on her alone. Another extraordinary fact was that although the jackals came close to her and practically brushed her legs with their tails, still they had obviously no intention of hurting her. Not one of them fell on her or bit her or showed any of their reputed inclinations. In fact they appeared to behave with great restraint. And yet who could feel comfortable in this surrounding? Madhavi's desire to get away from their oppressive kindness was but natural. But escape was impossible. This conclusion dawned on her when about fifty jackals joined together, their tails intertwined and their closeknit backs forming a spacious seat and steadily pressed on her. She closed her eyes in fear,

when she was swept off her feet, but she felt herself falling on a floor of warm hide. In a trice she was being carried away on their backs. She did not open her eyes until, after sometime, they suddenly stopped. She opened her eyes and saw it was her house. Just now the driver whose sense of duty was strong enough to master his fright and who had followed up rushed to the door and gave the knock which the grief-stricken father and son heard.

"I shall never more leave you" wept Madhavi after narrating all this. "It was wicked of me to have gone. But don't set those creatures on me!"

CHAPTER XXI

Kittoo Among Jackals

In the joy of their reunion the happy couple forgot all about their boy Kittoo. Grey light was breaking in the eastern sky when they discovered that Kittoo was not in the house. At first when the servant reported that Kittoo was missing, Madhavan took it lightly but Madhavi after a search for him in the house and in the immediate vicinity began to scream out her apprehension that the wicked jackals should have carried him away and Madhavan began to consider the proposition seriously.

It was not usual for Kittoo to go out alone. In fact he was a stay-at-home and too timid to be away from his parents. Was it possible that he was carried away by jackals? Madhavi's fear began to torment him; for should it prove true then Madhavi would once again try to jilt him. That both father and son should suffer from the jackal touch was too much for a lady like her.

Without uttering a word Madhavan took up his stick and went out. Madhavi offered to accompany him more to avoid being alone after her experience with the jackals than to take part in the search. But Madhavan asked her to stop at home.

"It is nothing," he said. "I am sure I will find Kittoo in the near-by street. In the meanwhile, take a little coffee and calm yourself."

But Kittoo was not in the next street nor anywhere in the immediate vicinity. It became necessary for Madhavan to pursue the search on the assumption that the boy was with the jackals. He hurried to the palmyra grove with which he was so familiar. As he walked on briskly he felt a strange feeling of estrangement with the jackals growing on him. Hitherto, he fought against the influence of jackals for the sake of his wife mastering with difficulty the resurgent feeling of kinship with them. But now he felt this tie suddenly breaking up. He suddenly began to wonder why he had been wasting his time in their company even at the risk of driving away his beloved wife from him.

"What a fool I have been!" he muttered as he walked on swinging his stick. "No wonder she is afraid of me! I deserve to be kicked by her for all I have done."

Here his thoughts were interrupted. He was now inside the jungle and he heard the howl which once worked like magic on him, but now fell flat on his ears. He himself wondered at the sudden conversion in him. How stupid of him to have ever reacted differently to the repulsive howl!

"Ooh! Ooh!" came the sounds intermittently and side by side with that he also heard a boy's voice. It was surely Kittoo's voice!

"Ooh! Ooh!" he heard first.

"Stop! Don't go! I shall give you rice and maize. Plenty of it! Don't go!" sounded the boy's voice.

"Ooh! Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!"

Madhavan hurried up. Under a thick cluster of palmyras Madhavan saw Kittoo playing with half a dozen jackals. Kittoo was leaning on and clasping two of the beasts and the rest were frisking about him. It was clear that Kittoo was addressing them and pleading with them not to go. He was generously promising to empty his father's barn for them.

The sight must have cheered Madhavan if he was grateful to the jackals. But curiously he got into a rage. It was but yesterday that he himself felt drawn to the jackals but now their very presence repelled him. It now seemed to him quite unnatural that Kittoo should befriend them.

"Come away! come away!" he shouted to Kittoo running up. At the same time he waved his stick at the jackals who looked at him incredulous for a moment. A few jackals' tails wagged at him a doubtful welcome and then they all joined together and rushed at him.

For the first time Madhavan ran away from Jackals. It was left to his son Kittoo to call them to order and come to his rescue.

"Go away! Go away!" he shouted to them. "Don't go near him!"

The jackals stopped all of a sudden in obedience to Kittoo but not before Madhavan had his first unpleasant shock of unfriendly contact with them. The touch of their tails was not so soft as it used to be. Nor was their paw altogether harmless. And their teeth! And their cunning eyes! They were not

what they were. The jackals felt so strange towards Madhavan and he fully reciprocated their feeling of estrangement. It seemed to him that it was ages before that he had anything to do with jackals. Surely he was not going to dedicate his son to the jackals.

At a word from Kittoo the jackals vanished. Madhavan had a vague, lingering consciousness of the language in which Kittoo shouted to the jackals. But the words eluded him and his grasp of their meaning was but momentary. It was all like words uttered in a dream which one struggles to recall or recapture. The strange, long spell had broken.

"Why are you here?" shouted Madhavan angrily, roughly handling Kittoo. "How came you here?"

"Why do you pull me so!" wailed Kittoo. "Do leave me!"

"You have no business to be wandering about here" shouted Madhavan angrily. "Your mother is so afraid and so angry. Come away!"

"I won't come!" said Kittoo stubbornly.

"If you won't come, I shall cane you" shouted Madhavan waving the cane minatorily.

"If you beat me, I shall call the jackals," retorted Kittoo. Madhavan rushed at Kittoo with the cane.

"Ooh! Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!" cried Kittoo.

It came so naturally to Kittoo. A few hours' contact with the jackals was sufficient to make him feel one with them. Something was working in his blood to bring out this quality which for want of a proper word could be termed as "jack-quality."

In response to Kittoo a large force of jackals poured into the wood from all directions. A dim scene in which he himself had commanded the jackals rose before Madhavan just now but he had burnt his boats and the usual familiarity with them ceased to work. He now felt himself an utterly hostile element in their midst. He felt completely cut off from them. It was no wonder that his wife quivered like an aspen-leaf after her experience with the jackals. Madhavan was hardly happy at the sight of the cunning, winking eyes and bushy, wagging tails.

Just now shouts were heard in the wood. A search party organised by Madhavi consisting of all their tenants made their appearance on the scene at this stage.

Shortly after Madhavan left, Madhavi began to feel concerned more about Madhavan than about Kittoo. She had a queer idea that her husband in his search for Kittoo would once more play into the hands of the jackals and so she sent for the tenants and despatched a strong contingent of them to get back her husband. Her fears were not false. Only this time they were true in a different way. Instead of playing into the hands of jackals, he encountered their opposition and that under the lead of his son.

Kittoo once again asked the jackals to leave which they did. The army of tenants stood mute at the scene. They would not have considered it anything strange if father and son had stood together against the jackals. But they were separated by a vast concourse of jackals. Stranger still was the fact that Kittoo stood quite hilarious at the other end. It was surely not a case of the boy being rescued by them from jackals but of their taking him away from them reluctantly. Little did they know that it was

exactly like this with his father too and that "jack-quality" was in the blood of the family.

Kittoo was at last taken home with some difficulty but the event had left Madhavan utterly gloomy for the rest of the day. He was already dreading the recurrence of Kittoo's sojourn with the jackals.

CHAPTER XXII

Sub-Inspector Damodar

The Sub-Inspector in charge of the Police Station at Ettukottai just at this time was one Mr. Damodar, a middle-aged man who entered service as a constable with little educational qualification but climbed up the ladder by his marked ability in detection work of which he gave very early indications. As a Head Constable often in charge of investigations he developed a consistent practice of never referring any case as undetected. Somebody had always to answer for a crime; and invariably it was an old offender. His ready discovery of the culprit and the stolen property, invariably simultaneously, was keenly appreciated by his superiors who often contrasted him with other subordinates who discovered neither but readily pleaded their conscience as an excuse.

"161!" shouted Mr. Damodar addressing his Head Constable. "Tear this petition and burn it".

Damodar sat at his table amidst a sea of old papers. He was putting every thing in order in view of the impending inspection by the Deputy Superintendent.

Here is an old lady complaining that her son had cut her ear." he said "My predecessor has neither

dated it nor entered it anywhere. I am sure the Deputy's wary eyes will alight on this first."

The Head Constable like his other colleagues and brethren in the department had become an impersonal number. He was hailed as 161 by every one including some members of the public who delighted to display their intimate knowledge of the departmental code. He was a silent and good enough type of man, although unkind critics were not wanting to make the unkind suggestion that his number had some reference to the section in the Indian Penal Code bearing the same number.

"This is initialled by your predecessor" replied H. C. 161 perusing the paper thrown at him by the Sub-Inspector. "I am afraid he might have registered it in the G. D. at the time."

"You are a fool!" shouted Mr. Damodar. "Do you tell me that the silly, tipsy fellow, who was here before me, ever looked into these things or entered them anywhere? Do as I tell you!"

H. C. 161 meekly obeyed.

"I shall tell the Deputy that you are tearing old petitions" squeaked a voice all of a sudden. It came from a stout dwarf inside the lock-up.

"379! Break this fellow's skull!" shouted the Sub-Inspector. P. C. 379 hastened to the cell and warned the dwarf to be quiet.

"Why, then, do you keep me here?" wailed the dwarf. "I was in my field when you took me. You swore that you took me here to restore to me my personal properties. You held them back for such a long time. I believed you and came. And now, I see you have laid a trap. It was always like this. I never committed any crime. Last time you sent me

to gaol, though I never stole the goat. I swear I never did. Yet I was in for 4 years. I came out only last month. Now, you have taken me again!"

"Shut up!" said Mr. Damodar. "You will get better treatment this time if you behave all right. 379! Hold his mouth! See that he does not utter a word!"

"I know your purpose!" wept the dwarf. "You always send innocent men to gaol. I know you want to say that I stole that Kooja there. That is why you asked me to take it and bring milk. That is why you fetched the hotel man and asked him to catch me in the street. Oh! it is too wicked of you! Have you no heart? Will your wife and children live after this?"

"You are going to be a prey to this stick" snarled Damodar angrily removing the cigarette from his mouth. "379! Are you going to whip him or not?"

He hurled a sheaf of papers at P. C. 379, who rushed to the lock-up and delivered through the gratings a stunning blow on the dwarf's head. The dwarf withdrew whimpering to a corner. In the meanwhile the papers thrown at the Constable lay scattered all over the room. P. C. 379 picked them up and put them on the Sub-Inspector's table.

"Good Lord! what do I have here?" shouted Damodar all of a sudden perusing one of them. "It is too good to be true. Against whom is this F. I. R.? Read this portion written in Tamil!"

Mr. Damodar was forgetting a little of his Tamil with every promotion. In fact when he became a Sub-Inspector he swore never to speak or write in Tamil. But unfortunately his father had withdrawn him from studies before he had passed into his Secondary School stage. The result was that he was

not as strong in English as he was at detection work. Often his colleagues roared with laughter over anything he said or wrote in English; and many were the dull hours in court proceedings which he enlivened by his inspired sallies in that language; but, for the life of him, he could never understand what provoked the mirth of his colleagues or of the court and he attributed it to sheer jealousy.

"This F. I. R. refers to a case more than twenty years ago" said P. C. 379.

"Read the Tamil stuff there." Cried Mr. Damodar ' I want to see if I read it correctly."

P. C. 379 read as follows:

"Submitted to Sub-Inspector by H. C. 380 and P. C. 395.

"Sir, we were deputed by you on the information of the village Headman of Nallanarikkadu to proceed to the village and apprehend a notorious culprit called Mathu alias Madhavan. On 1-2-1925 we left the village in the evening with the culprit who is a young boy but who seems to be of desperate character. When we arrested him, he gave prevaricating replies as to his whereabouts. On the way, just outside the village, the boy was rescued by jackals and he made good his escape. We therefore request that necessary action may be taken against him."

"That is very good" said Mr. Damodar. "So they registered a case under S. 186, 225 and 225 B against the absconder as well as those that rescued?"

"Yes" said P. C. 379.

"But who rescued him? Read again" asked Mr. Damodar.

The portion was again read.

"I think" said Damodar "the word 'jackals' refers to some nick name. We must find out if any one went by the name of "Jackals" in the village."

"But who is Mathu?" asked P. C. 379. "You must first have him."

"Look here, you fool!" cried Mr. Damodar "I am told that fellow Madhavan Kangani was called Mathu in the old days. When he invited all and sundry for the feast in his house, I heard people saying that he was a mere urchin hereabout in his boyhood. I have no doubt that this F. I. R. is against this fellow. I have decided to prosecute him for the offences. The upstart had the cheek not to invite me for the function in his house. I shall make him disgorge a little of his ill-gotten wealth!"

Mr. Damodar meant what he said. He was always sensitive on points touching social distinction and he could not easily forgive Madhavan for the slight offered to him. How was he to know that the invitation intended for him fell into the hands of his estimable namesake? He lost no time in getting hold of H. C. 380 and P. C. 395. They had both retired from service, but H C. 380 was conveniently near at hand; for after retirement he had set up a grocery shop just opposite to the police station at Ettukottai; while the retired constable was supplying milk to every successive Sub-Inspector at this station and incidentally making timely and fertile suggestions on matters connected with pending investigations

In a few days Mr. Damodar was posted with all the details of the incident which occurred many years ago. He was no doubt disappointed to find that the reference to jackals in the report was not a veiled reference to human beings as he supposed. But he was not deterred by that circumstance from proceeding

against Madhavan. He was always lucky in being able to unearth sensational cases wherever he went; and he hoped to make his mark at this station by disinterring a matter dead and buried in the dust of twenty years.

CHAPTER XXIII

Madhavan's Lawyer

Ettukottai was notorious for its love of litigation. Particularly in fighting out criminal cases the men here evinced an astonishing grasp both of procedural and substantive law. Experienced criminal lawyers in the district often found themselves on their trial when engaged by Ettukottaians. Else-where the ignorance and obedience of their clients rendered their job pleasant and easy; they were the sole masters of the situation with abundant scope for avoiding and asking questions; but here every question had to pass through the crucible of lay criticism and test. The worst or best of it was that for one judge sitting ahead of you paid by Government you had never less than a dozen sapient judges sitting on the floor behind you unpaid by anybody; and their nod of approval or dissent was fatal to your reputation.

But Madavan Kangani was an exception. Though born on the same soil he was in many respects an exotic; and to courts and lawyers he was an utter stranger. Indeed he was sincerely afraid of them as though they were not really instruments for protection of rights and vindication of justice but otherwise. He therefore felt himself at sea when one morning he was practically hauled up from his bed and marched to the court in Ettukottai. He cudgelled his brain all

the way along to make out what it was all about ; and as far as he could guess the only possible charge that could be levelled against him was the celebrated feast he gave recently at which he might have infringed some one or other of the provisions of the austerity law.

But he was not long left guessing. It must be said to the credit of Ettukottaians that they are real beacon lights to men at sea in litigation. Some of the most tested leaders of the community at once sprang up to the defence of Madhavan; and no time was lost in engaging a competent lawyer. Madhavan was taken out on bail immediately on production before the Sub-Magistrate of Ettukottai ; and surely his lawyer was able to discover that the charge related to escape from lawful custody, obstruction to public servants in the discharge of their functions and the like conduct.

Madhavan's lawyer was a fairly elderly man of medium height, bald at the crown, and with an irrepressible belly which he tried to conceal as frantically as inconvenient facts in a case. He carried quite a variety of spectacles with him which he changed in the course of his cross examination and arguments as often as the importance of the case required. The end of every question put by him to witnesses and of every sentence in argument uttered by him was punctuated by the loud closing and opening of spectacles-cases. The series of tup-tups approximated very much in character to the clappings at music to keep time. This was one of the peculiar features of the man which endeared him to the litigants of Ettukottai ; for magistrates could not afford to sleep, as they often did, while this gentleman spoke.

Mr. T. S. Raghavan, as the lawyer was called, had very easy manners. He always took things lightly and laughed at others who evinced the least anxiety to be

accurate in their utterances. His freedom from facts was his great asset as clients counted on this virtue as the height of his resources. He could argue without a pause for a couple of hours without once referring to what was in the records; and although he was often pulled up by higher courts, the lower magistracy had endured his performances for nearly a quarter of a century.

All his merits were duly canvassed by Madhavan's advisers before he was engaged. And Madhavan after a brief chat with him on the first day had no reason to differ from their opinion of him.

"Do you mean to tell me that nothing of the kind happened at all on 1-2-1945?" asked Mr. T. S. Raghavan when Madhavan and his friends came to him to give instruction. The enquiry was to begin in a couple of days and they were all anxious to know the exact allegations against the accused.

"Yes, absolutely nothing happened" replied Madhavan.

"The date given there is not 1-2-45. It is 1-2-1925" said one of Madhavan's advisers perusing the charge sheet. "Please see here."

The speaker was well known in Ettukottai as Law Point Raghunathan and it was characteristic of him to get at the date sooner than his lawyer.

"But I am afraid it is a mistake for 1-2-45" said Mr. T. S. Raghavan "1-2-1925 is preposterously ancient."

"But look here," said Law Point "the list of witnesses establishes the date. I know dear old H. C. 380 and P. C. 395. Both retired from service long ago. This must relate to something that occurred when they were in service."

"It must be strange if that were so" muttered the lawyer opening and shutting one of his cases. "It sounds incredible."

He turned over the pages of the First Information Report and the charge sheet and said that Law Point Raghunathan was correct.

"Any way, you must be able to tell us whether anything of the kind occurred at least twenty years ago or not, assuming that the date here is not a slip" said the lawyer addressing Madhavan.

Madhavan related to him with characteristic brevity the incident that took place when he was led by the policemen nearly twenty years ago. The frequent and rapid tup-tups that punctuated Madavan as he spoke indicated his lawyer's keen interest in the odd story.

"To be sure, it is a strange case" said the lawyer. Usually he spoke to new clients of exactly similar cases in which he had succeeded before they came; but he was compelled to confess that this was totally unlike any of them. "The strangest feature here is about the motive of the prosecution. Why should this case be brought now? Who is at the back of it? How is this funny Sub-Inspector, Damodar, interested in raking this matter up?"

Law Point Raghunathan answered all the points. He had just come to the lawyer after a talk with H. C 380 and P. C. 395. The fact was that Sub-Inspector Damodar was angry with Madhavan for not inviting him for the feast.

An explosion from a pince-nez box clinched this discovery.

"That settles it!" tup-tupped the lawyer. "We will smash the funny old fellow when he gets into the box."

"You may smash him" said Raghunathan. "I know you will, but what about the occurrence on 1-2-1925? We must smash that. Are we going to admit the occurrence?"

"We accept nothing, we question everything" said the lawyer vehemently. "You leave all that to me. Now, I have understood the whole case. Mr. Madhavan, you may go home and sleep. Please do not worry about the case in the least."

Madhavan went home dazed. The entire discussion was over his head. But he had long ago resigned himself to his advisers in this matter and did not bother to understand what was being discussed. The easy confidence of the lawyer restored his spirit a little but his counsellors when they sensed this result lost no time in telling him that the lawyer had only a limited role in the case and that men like them alone had ampler powers to make and unmake cases.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Trial

When on the morning of the enquiry Mr. T. S. Raghavan was informed that Madhavan's case had been transferred from the file of the Sub-Magistrate to the Special Honorary First Class Magistrate, he could not believe his ears. It was the strangest thing to happen to the strangest of all cases. The offence alleged against Madhavan was an offence triable by a Second Class Magistrate and why on earth it was transferred to a first class Magistrate was more than he could make out. He was particularly annoyed that this case had to go before Damodar who was the Honorary Magistrate at the time. They were both

members of the Pinjrapole Club; and Mr. T. S. Raghavan with his incurable habit of laughing at others had often ridiculed the old man especially with reference to his schemes which he openly called chimerical. The old man never took insults lying down and he often turned the ridicule on the lawyer by calling him Mr. Tup. Tup

The fact was that the Sub-Inspector, Mr. Damodar, with his usual enthusiasm and desire for distinction had sent lengthy reports to his superiors about the peculiar features of the case and pleaded for a special court to deal with it. The District Magistrate who was addressed in the matter took advice from his office which after poring over old files singled out old Mr. Damodar as particularly equipped with intimate knowledge of the ways of jackals; and consequently the case was made over to him.

Mr. Damodar, Honorary First Class Magistrate, was at his seat punctually at 11 A. M. The court hall and the verandah outside buzzed with excitement. Madhavan Kangani was given a seat beside his Counsel, inspite of the vehement protest of the Sub-Inspector. The Senior Assistant Public Prosecutor who had been specially deputed to prosecute this case tried to support the Sub-Inspector's objection but he found the court strong on the point and discreetly left the matter there.

Before the case was commenced Law Point Raghunathan rose from the floor and audibly whispered a few words to his lawyer. Thereupon Mr. Raghavan rose and made a submission to the court.

"I submit that it is necessary to ask the Sub-Inspector to keep outside the court hall when we examine the witnesses", said the lawyer. "Normally I may not care to press this matter. But in this case

the attitude of the Sub-Inspector compels me to demand this right for the accused."

The Court immediately agreed and the Sub-Inspector had to leave his seat and go out. There was a buzz of satisfaction emanating from the crowded floor. But this did not prevent the Sub-Inspector, as he retreated, from expressing in a stage whisper his opinion of the court which was hardly complimentary.

The first witness examined was Raman Ambalagaran. Though older than Pichaimuthu, his neighbour, by many years, he had survived him; and was the only witness available to speak to the first report sent from Nallanarikkadu twenty years ago. Luckily for the prosecution Raman was one of the attesting witnesses in the report. He narrated the circumstances under which they came to detest Mathu and decide to hand him over to the Police.

"But did he not teach you a new method of cultivation?" asked the Magistrate suddenly. "Did he not help you to get rid of expensive cattle?"

Before the witness could answer, the Prosecutor protested against the question. He reasonably urged that the aspect of the case stressed by the court was irrelevant to the offence charged against the accused.

"The question is about escape from custody and obstruction to public servants" he urged. "We are not concerned with the cattle of Nallanarikkadu.

"Well!" grunted the Magistrate. "My view is different. But you may proceed."

Raman Ambalagaran was allowed to proceed and relate how on the same night Mathu returned to the village after escape from the policemen and how he subsequently disappeared from the village. He went further and charged the jackals with having ravaged

their fields after Mathu's departure as a measure of reprisal.

As the counsel for the accused stated that he had no question to put to this witness, the next witness was called. It was no other than Bondili, the jackal-catcher. How he was traced and secured by the Sub-Inspector must remain one of the mysteries of this case. Bondili was now old in years but not in spirit; and, if anything, mellower in his jackal-lore. He stated in a few vivid sentences all about his first encounter with Mathu and the jackals more than twenty years ago. He also referred to the fact that one evening he saw Mathu led by two policemen from the village of Nallanarikkadu. Here the two policemen were called and identified by Bondili.

So far Bondili spoke the truth, except perhaps when he identified H. C. 380 and P. C. 395 at this distance of time. But the rest of his evidence was quite false. He added that later that evening when he was returning home he saw a thousand jackals attacking the Policemen.

"The leader of the jackals was the fattest jackal I have seen" said Bondili. Then turning to the court, he said, "Ejaman knows the fat jackal. I brought him to you for training though just then he had grown lean by fasting."

Bondili's familiarity with the Magistrate naturally surprised all those who heard him. It disconcerted even Mr. Damodar who was no stickler for formalities.

"Will you shut up or shall I fine you?" shouted old Mr. Damodar. "You are not here to speak about anything except this case."

"I beg of Ejaman not to grow angry" said Bondili. "I only wanted to remind you that......"

The Prosecutor effectively gagged Bondili by shouting "won't you keep quiet ?"

The Prosecutor sat down and it was now Mr. T. S. Raghavan's turn for cross examination.

"Bondili!" said the lawyer. "Tup!"

"Ejaman!" replied the witness.

"After you saw Mathu that evening, you never saw him again! Tup!"

"No, Ejaman!" said Bondili.

"Not even once. Tup!"

"No, except……"

"Look here" said the lawyer sounding the case. "you must answer my question. You never saw him afterwards ?"

"He said that already" spoke the court.

"Well, your Honour, I leave it there" said Mr. Raghavan.

"Look here, Bondili! Tup. !"

"Yes, Ejaman!"

"You saw only a boy then ? Tup"

"Yes."

"You did not see this man then ? Tup."

"No."

"You did not see this man at any time. Tup!"

"No."

"Nor could you identify any of the jackals? Tup!"

This question Mr. Raghavan put on inspiration from the floor.

"No" said Bondili but added, "I could ...."

Raghavan violently tup-tupped the witness so as to drown his words.

"Look here! you said you could not identify the jackals. Don't try to change! Tup, Tup!"

"No" said Bondili.

Raghavan sat down triumphantly, tup-tupping two cases at the same time.

The Prosecutor sat alone on his side looking bemused. He had no further questions to put to Bondili. But Bondili had not finished.

"Ejaman!" he said turning to the court. "This is the season to get jackals and train them. Nowadays jackals are quite tame and do not bite as they once......"

Before he could finish he was dragged out by two constables.

The third witness examined was H. C. 380 who described the capture of Mathu and the rescue by jackals. He also added that while he and his companion were in fright, Mathu was laughing and feeling quite hilarious.

"You did not see the boy at any time subsequently?" tup-tupped Raghavan.

"No" said H. C. 380.

"Nor did you see this man here at any time before?"

It was the unanimous view of the Bench, Bar and the Floor that this was a dangerous question to put. But luckily H. C. 380 answered in the negative. Needless to say that two cases exploded together.

Though Raghavan had no further question and had sat down perfectly satisfied with himself, the Magistrate thought that he had omitted to touch an essential aspect of the case.

"Beyond laughing, Mathu did nothing to get away from you ?" asked the Magistrate.

"No" said H. C. 380.

"But for the jackals, you could have led him on to your station ?"

"Yes."

Mr. Damodar looked through his powerful glasses first at the Prosecutor and then at the Lawyer. The Prosecutor acknowledged the cleverness of the question by a nod of approval. But the Lawyer showed signs of being offended. He thought that the Magistrate had really meant to suggest to the Floor that he had failed to put an important question. He therefore pouted his lips at the question just when Mr. Damodar beamed on him as who should say "How do you like that ?"

P. C. 395 was then examined and he fully supported the strange story related by H. C. 380. The Lawyer put him the same questions and got the same answers. The Magistrate also put the same questions to him as he put to H.C.380 and got the same answers.

The Prosecutor then rose and called the Sub-Inspector. But the Sub-Inspector had left the place in a huff and was not available. After sending for him several times the Prosecutor applied to the court for a short adjournment. But to his surprise the court refused to adjourn.

"I know he dare not get into the box" said Mr. Raghavan. "I would have exposed why he charged

Madhavan in this case after the lapse of so many years."

"What is the motive you are imputing?" asked the Prosecutor.

"I am not imputing anything" said the lawyer. "I am stating a fact. Mr. Damodar, the Sub-Inspector, is angry because Madhavan did not invite him for the function in his house."

"We can close the prosecution without that man" said Damodar determinedly.

Mr. Damodar rose announcing that they would reassemble in the afternoon and retired to his chamber. He immediately started to write his order. All the interval the expectant crowd kept peering through key-holes and chinks in the doors behind which Mr. Damodar was working away over his file. While ignorant men in Madhavan's camp were wondering what the court was going to do. Law Point Raghunathan was confidently assuring them that it was beyond doubt that the court was rapidly writing an order and the only order that could be pronounced at that stage was an order in favour of the accused.

But Raghavan was a little mortified by the attitude of the Court. Surely the court should have heard his arguments?

"I wonder what that fool is doing inside" he said to the Floor. "I want to argue the matter threadbare before the cranky fellow decides one way or the other."

"But he will save you all that trouble" said Raghunathan "I am sure he will discharge Madhavan."

"I should think so too" said the lawyer. "We have brought out all necessary points in cross-examination. We have shattered the evidence. But there

is no knowing what the fellow will do. Further he is counting on his Rao Sahib in the New Year's list."

At this stage the doors of the Chamber were flung open and Mr. Damodar hurried out perspiring. He dashed to his seat with a fat order which he commenced to read at once. He read on for a couple of hours in a loud, clear voice so that every one could hear. The Prosecutor and the Lawyer frequently looked at each other greatly puzzled and now and then indicated their weariness by yawning loudly. Mr. Raghavan noisily changed glasses to outwit sleep. But Mr. Damodar showed no signs of abatement.

"I am afraid he is stark mad!" snapped out Mr. Raghavan in utter despair.

"What has all this to do with this wretched case?" said the Prosecutor.

They both spoke so loudly that Mr. Damodar had to take notice of them.

"Well, gentlemen, I am not surprised" said Mr. Damodar looking at his critics. "This is not the first time that men fail to understand my ideas. More distinguished men, I mean the members of the Agricultural Commission, have betrayed more appalling inability to catch simple facts. If you do not see in the juvenile activities of that unfortunate accused there a lasting solution of the problems that face the poor ryots, I am not to blame. Nor is he to blame."

The entire court hall remained hushed under this stern rebuke, except when Mr. Raghavan changed his spectacles for the hundredth time and remarked to the Prosecutor "I am damn sure he is reading one of his cursed treatises."

Mr. Raghavan had hit upon the truth. What Mr. Damodar was reading was really the treatise which

he had read before the famous Commission. It was his undeserved lot a second time in his life to read his great message to an audience who thought him mad.

"Now tell me if this has nothing to do with your case," said Damodar angrily turning to the concluding portion of his order.

Even his bitterest enemies would have admitted that this portion did relate to the case on hand. Here Mr. Damodar paid a handsome tribute to Madhavan and his utter innocence. He said it was probable that his name-sake the Sub-Inspector owed a grudge against the accused presumably for failing to invite him for the function in his house. Above all he held that it was clearly established by answers elicited by the Court which the defence counsel had failed to elicit that the accused did nothing to escape from custody and that it was the jackals that rescued him. How could the accused prevent the jackals from rescuing him, if the police men themselves could not do so?

"I therefore discharge the accused," said Mr. Damodar "A great injustice has been done to him. I know personally his great contributions in the cause of agriculture. While he justly waited for applause for his original idea, this is what an ungrateful world and a malicious Sub-Inspector gave him."

CHAPTER XXV

Palm Repeats Itself

Madhavan Kangani had no doubt got out of the case but not out of the mental depression into which it had plunged him. The excitement following his unexpected arrest, the confusion caused by conflicting advices from his counsellors, the evidence at the

enquiry with its emphasis on a period of his life which he desired to live down and the judgment of Damodar which was widely reported in the newspapers had completely upset his mental equanimity.

One evening, a week after the judgment was delivered, when he felt in a mood to get out of the house, Madhavan was sitting in his pretty garden with his wife who was doing her best to cheer him. She felt immensely happy that Madhavan was at last out of the wood, entirely weaned from the influence of jackals. Now and then she threw an anxious look at Kittoo who was playing near the front gate of the bungalow. He was getting up and getting down the gate, closing it and opening it frequently, much to the irritation of Madhavan.

Just then their servant came in.

"There is a famous palmist who has come in the village" he announced "They say that he is very wise. I told him that Ejaman would like to see him."

"No, I don't want him here" said Madhavan.

But Madhavi felt a little curiosity to know what a palmist was. She had heard of such things long ago. She begged Madhavan to have the palmist brought.

So the servant went and brought the palmist. The palmist was an old man and to Madhavi who expected to see an odd figure clothed in curious habiliment it was a little disappointing. But she hoped that he would distinguish himself by his prediction. Madhavan asked him to see the hand of Kittoo first.

"See the palm of that rogue there" said Madhavan "He is giving us a lot of trouble."

With difficulty the servant fetched Kittoo. The palmist held the right hand first, then the left hand, strained his eye over a line here and a line there.

"I have seen exactly this same palm nearly thirty years ago," shouted the palmist in amazement. "Not a single change. All the lines are the same. It is the same palm."

"Don't be a fool" shouted Madhavan. "The boy is hardly nine years old and you pretend you saw his palm thirty years ago. Who will believe such stories!"

The old palmist felt greatly affronted. He pulled out a big bundle from his pocket and unfolded before Madhavan's eyes an incredible series of testimonials from eminent men all over the world. Madhavan stretched out his hand to take the bundle when all of a sudden the palmist shouted.

"Here I am!" he cried, seizing the right hand of Madhavan and straitening out his palm" "I suspected as much. It is this palm that I saw thirty years ago. You are Suppan's son, are you not? You were then a child and I predicted you would turn out a ruler. And I say the same of that boy there. It is a remarkable case of repetition in palmistry."

Madhavi who sat silent till now felt compelled to add.

"Yes, the Palmist is right, if he meant a ruler not of men but of jackals!"

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